EXPOSITIONS

ON SOME OF THE

MOST HIGHLY PICTUREQUE,

AND

INTERESTING PASSAGES

OF

SCRIPTURE.

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OF

SCRIPTURE;

WHEREIN SEVERAL OF THE

STRONGEST EMOTIONS,

AND

FINER FEELINGS OF HUMAN NATURE,

ARE ATTEMPTED TO BE

DELINEATED.

By DANIEL TURNER, A.M.
WOOLWICH.

THE WORKS OF THE LORD ARE GREAT, SOUGHT OUT OF ALL THEM THAT HAVE PLEASURE THEREIN. HIS WORK IS HONOURABLE AND GLORIOUS. DAVID.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, FOR IN THEM YE THINK YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE; AND THEY ARE THEY, WHICH TESTIFY OF ME. JESUS CHRIST.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY JOHN CROWDER,

FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

M.DCC.XC.

ADVERTISEMENT.

EXPOSITION, is a favourite mode of inſtruction with the Author of the following; who apprehends it to be eaſy for the memory of the hearer;—peculiarly adapted to raiſe the affections;—engage the underſtanding;—and impreſs the heart. For ſeventeen years paſt, with very few exceptions, I have expounded once every Lord's Day, being humbly perſuaded, that it pleaſed Providence, frequently to render it uſeful,—and to my audience it was always agreeable.

Long after I had purſued this line, what tended not a little, to confirm me, in the opinion of its rectitude, was, the finding a perfect coincidence of ſentiment, with one of the firſt Pulpit Orators of the age, who in his lectures on Rhetoric, thus expreſſes himſelf.

" No ſtudy, therefore, is more neceſſary for " a Preacher, than the ſtudy of human life, " and of the human heart. To be able to " diſcover a man to himſelf, in a light in " which he never ſaw his own character be- " fore, produces a wonderful effect. Thoſe " Sermons, though the moſt difficult in com- " poſition, are not only the moſt beautiful, " but alſo the moſt uſeful, which are founded " on the illuſtration of ſome peculiar charac- " ter, or remarkable piece of hiſtory, in the " ſacred writings; by the purſuit of which, " we may trace, and lay open, ſome of the " moſt ſecret windings of the human heart.— " Other topics of preaching have become " trite and common; but this is an extenſive " field, which has hitherto been little ex- " plored, and poſſeſſes all the advantages of " being curious, new, and in the higheſt de- " gree uſeful."

How

How far my plan, correſponds with the above ideas, of that elegant writer, becomes not me to determine. What knowledge of human nature, ariſing from ſtudy and obſervation; may appear in this volume?—Whether the characters drawn,—or the ſituations in the world, which I have eſſayed to deſcribe, ſtand on their own ground, and in proper colours? —Whether the moral paintings of the ſeveral paſſions, be tolerably ſtriking and natural?— If the other religious points, of a more practical tendency, be rationally, and clearly ſtated? —Or finally, Whether the reflections thence deduced, and the motives to piety and goodneſs, which are urged, be pertinent and juſt? —the impartial yet generous public will now decide.

I own great ſcope hath been given to fancy, and in ſallies of the imagination I have much indulged; on a thorough conviction, that theſe under certain limitations, may at times, prove excellent handmaids, to the moſt important

tenets of Chriſtianity. The ſpeeches, which I have put in the mouths of the perſonages, brought forward; with various actions attributed to them, will, I truſt, be found analogous,—to what is narrated concerning them, in the pure word of God.

Earneſtly wiſhing, to be more and more acquainted with the truths of revelation, and not apt to be eaſily daunted, in the defence of thoſe leading and precious doctrines; on which, together with the influence they have on our conduct, reſulting from the change they work in our hearts;—the ſtate and degree of our preſent and future happineſs, more immediately depends.—I equally deteſt, and uniformly am ſolicitous to ſhun, the very appearance of illiberality, and a narrow ſpirit: eſpecially in religious matters, where Intolerance, ſhould it fall ever ſo ſhort of perſecution, muſt at leaſt beget diſcord and envy, which are inimical to our nobleſt proſpects, and much degrade us as men. In conſiſtence with

with ſuch a profeſſion; I have ſaid nothing againſt any ſect, or party; merely viewed in that light. There may be many things good, —and ſomething wrong in all: wherefore by preſerving a due temper, and ſpirit of moderation, writers may ſtrenuouſly contend, for what they ſuppoſe, to be the *Faith* delivered to the Saints, without the tincture of acrimony, or violating that law of kindneſs, which ought to bind man to man.

My ambition is, to fix my opinions on what, after ſerious thought, and the beſt uſe of the means in my power, I conceive to be the will of God ſpeaking in the pages of holy Inſpiration. Where I have differed from other writers;—or hazarded any particular conſtruction of the text, it has been done, I hope, with ſuitable diffidence, and on the baſis of arguments fairly advanced. To think for ourſelves, is the duty, as well as unalienable right of every man, and to publiſh thoſe thoughts

with freedom, is the invaluable privilege of a Briton, which, Oh! that every individual upon earth enjoyed. Nevertheleſs be it our's, to uſe that freedom, according to the ſtricteſt rules of decency, prudence, and public utility.

With leſs heſitation than uſual, I throw myſelf on the candour of the Public; from a grateful recollection, of the general ſentence paſſed on my laſt little volume; and the kind reception it met with, from readers of every claſs and denomination. This partly emboldened me, once more on religious ſubjects, to ſtand at the ſame bar. Did length of time add any weight in ſuch a caſe; it might be urged, that the advice of Horace, *prematur in nonum annum*, has been reſpecting moſt of theſe Diſcourſes, doubly obſerved. No doubt, alterations were occaſionally made, till about four years ago, having loſt by death, an amiable partner, the breathings of whoſe genius, had been cheriſhed by judicious applauſe, and whoſe

whoſe private virtues, ſecured her the eſteem of every acquaintance; I ſpent my ſolitary hours, amidſt the duties of my profeſſion, and the various concerns of my numerous, but dear little family, in the tranſcribing them anew: when I alſo compoſed enough, in addition to what I had, for a ſecond volume, were it ever to be demanded.

Should the following Expoſitions, which were delivered from the pulpit, in parts; according as the number of verſes, ſupplied materials, for the length of an ordinary diſcourſe, now ſtill more extenſively operate, under the Divine Bleſſing, towards advancing the real intereſts of virtue and religion, it will ſoothe the heavieſt moments of the Author. Every preſſure muſt feel the lighter, on reflecting, that by labouring in the ſacred ſervice of the Supreme Being, he hath attempted to throw in his mite, for nurturing the principles of benevolence and univerſal philanthropy in the human

human heart: and for improving the ſpiritual, of courſe, by far the moſt laſting and valuable concerns, of his fellow-creatures.

Woolwich, Kent,
April 28, 1790.

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EXPOSITION I.

From GEN. XXII. and firſt Fourteen Verſes.

And it came to paſs after theſe things, that God did tempt Abraham, and ſaid unto him, Abraham: and he ſaid, Behold, *here I am.* And he ſaid, take now thy ſon, thine only *ſon* Iſaac, whom thou loveſt, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham roſe up early in the morning, and ſaddled his aſs, and took two of his young men with him, and Iſaac his ſon; and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and roſe up, and went unto the place which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lift up his eyes, and ſaw the place afar off. And Abraham ſaid unto his young men, Abide you here with the aſs; and I and the lad will go yonder and worſhip, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid *it* upon Iſaac his ſon; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife: and they went both of them together. And Iſaac ſpake unto Abraham his father, and ſaid, My father. And he ſaid, Here *am* I, my ſon: and he ſaid, Behold, the fire and the wood: but where *is* the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham ſaid, My ſon, God will provide himſelf a lamb for a burnt-offering: ſo they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order: and bound Iſaac his ſon, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham

ſtretched forth his hand, and took the knife to ſlay his ſon. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and ſaid, Abraham, Abraham, and he ſaid, Here *am I*. And he ſaid, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou feareſt God, ſeeing thou haſt not with-held thy ſon, thine only *ſon* from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the ſtead of his ſon. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is ſaid *to* this day, in the mount of the Lord it ſhall be ſeen.

THIS is one of the moſt ſingular events in the Jewiſh hiſtory, and perhaps the moſt intereſting, and wonderful circumſtance, that ever took place between the Creator, and the Creature. Its expreſs alluſion, to the great ſacrifice for ſin under the New Teſtament, we preſume cannot be denied; wherefore, the minuteſt particulars relative to it, merit our ſerious attention.

According to the Talmudiſts, it was tranſacted ſoon after the weaning of Iſaac, when he was about five years old, the futility whereof, is evident from this; that on ſuch a ſuppoſition, he could not have carried a load of wood, ſufficient to make a fire, to conſume a burnt-offering. Aben Ezra, fixes on the age of thirteen years: Joſephus ſays, he was twenty-five, which is alſo adopted by Biſhop Uſher, placing it twenty years after the weaning of him, in anno mundi 2133, and before Chriſt 1871. Near to this, is the computation

computation of a famous Jewiſh chronologer, who makes Iſaac at this time to be twenty-ſix years of age: ſome fix it at thirty-three,—according to the Targum of Jonathan, he was thirty-ſix, and ſeveral writers apprehend he was about thirty-ſeven.

Verſe 1ſt. *And it came to paſs after theſe things, that God did tempt Abraham, and ſaid unto him, Abraham: and he ſaid, Behold here I am.*

The firſt clauſe of the verſe refers to the various occurrences in Providence, and the interpoſitions of grace in his favour, which had taken place, and which he had experienced previous to this. After many promiſes, relative to his poſterity, and many bleſſings beſtowed on himſelf:—his family in peace in the land of the Philiſtines: and Iſaac his ſon grown up, to be the comfort of his declining years. When he probably thought his troubles over: Infinite wiſdom rouzes him, with one of the hardeſt trials, that ever mortal met with, in this vale of tears. Days of reſt are never ſtationary, till the individual is beyond imperfection, and the power of ſin. We are informed, that Elohim, tempted, that is tried, or proved Abraham. In Scripture he is ſaid to do this, when he demands ſome ſpecial proof of faith, love, and obedience in his people. Thus at Marah's ſtreams, And he cried unto the Lord, and the Lord ſhewed him a tree, which when he had caſt into the waters, the waters were made ſweet, there he made for them

a ſtatute, and an ordinance, and there he proved them *.—And thou ſhalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee, theſe forty years in the wilderneſs, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldſt keep his commandments, or no †. Another point connected with this ſenſe of the phraſe is — when David ſaid he had never proved, that is he had never tried the armour, which Saul wiſhed him to put on. That temptation often ſignifies, a ſoliciting or provoking to evil, we admit as in the caſe of Satan tempting our Saviour; and denotes inward corruption, in which ſenſe, according to the Apoſtle James, God tempteth no man.

The trials which Providence puts upon us, are always ultimately for our good. Who fed thee in the wilderneſs with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end ‡. Agreeable to this ſpeaketh the Apoſtle, There hath no temptation taken you, but ſuch as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation, alſo make a way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it §. The Almighty

* Exod. xv. 25. † Deut. viii. 2. ‡ Deut. viii. 16.
§ 1 Cor. x. 13.

knoweth

knoweth what is in man, and what he himſelf will do, yet for the elevation and refinement of our real goodneſs and virtue, deigns, thus to ſpeak to his people, in providence, and in grace. Here once more, which ſome writers ſuppoſe to be the tenth time, Abraham is called to peculiar affliction. The call though probably in viſion impreſſed, equalled the hearing of a voice diſtinctly, to which is annexed the Patriarch's firm and prompt reply—Here I am—ready to ſay, or do, whatever I am perſuaded is thy ſovereign will. Proſperity had not enervated his aſſiduity, or rendered him indolent in the performance of duty.

Verſe 2d. *And he ſaid, Take now thy ſon, thine only ſon Iſaac, whom thou loveſt, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there, for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains, which I will tell thee of.*

The Jewiſh writers, repreſent God and Abraham in a diſcourſe together, an idea rather fanciful, than ſupported by the text, Says the Supreme Being—Take now thy ſon:—replies the Patriarch—I have two. Thine only:—they are both the only ſons of their mothers, conſequently each my only, by theſe much loved, and reſpective women:—whom thou loveſt:—I love both the lads, and to each have given my bleſſing—Thy Iſaac I demand.

Here we have three duties injoined the Patriarch, each exciting ſeparate reflections in his mind. Directly take thy darling, for whom thou would not only dare every extremity, but chearfully die, thy Iſaac, the ſon of joy, that made all glad: take him from the mother, who doats on him; from his friends, who rejoice in the communications of his mild virtues—from his ſervants, that live but in his approbation, ſeveral of whom expect to paſs the evening of their days in peace, owing to his bounty. At the injunction of this duty, whatever uncertainty he might be in, it was reaſonable for him to ſuppoſe, from the amazing promiſes, relative to Iſaac, that ſomething good was intended.

The ſecond duty injoined is—Get thee into the land of Moriah, that is the high land, or land of divine worſhip, as it hath been rendered. Moriah literally means the fear of the Lord. According to Jewiſh tradition, Adam and Noah ſacrificed, and ſerved God on this very high mount, and it is alſo thought to be the mount Sion, on which Solomon built the temple, where God commanded the offerings to be made. Then Solomon began to build the houſe of the Lord at Jeruſalem, in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared, in the threſhing floor of Ornan the Jebuſite.

ſite *. From its firſt being ſaid the land of Moriah, and afterwards in the ſame verſe, on one of the mountains which I will tell thee of, it appears, there were ſeveral of them pretty near each other; which in proceſs of time, went by different names: as Mount Sion,—the hill Acra,—Mount Calvary, and Mount Moriah, ſuppoſed to be the one intended. From all this, the Patriarch might infer, that ſomething very ſolemn was to be tranſacted, though it was impoſſible, the moſt diſtant idea of it, could enter his mind.

Till he heard the third duty injoined—Offer him there for a burnt-offering. For a whole aſcenſion, from its being totally conſumed upon the altar. With reverence, let us ſpeak—Is he not deſired to reconcile contradictions? And O! aſtoniſhing fact! — by the mandate of Heaven, God had ſaid, Thou ſhalt not kill: yet here a tender father is ordered to ſacrifice his ſon. The Almighty had promiſed, this ſhould be the ſpring of bleſſings to multitudes, countleſs as the ſtars of heaven; yet he muſt now die in his youth, without an offspring. What muſt his parental heart have felt, on receiving this peremptory command? Might he not ſtart from his couch—fly to that of his ſon,—hang over the ſoftneſs of his compoſed look, in the arms of refreſhing ſlumber, and in the expreſſive ſilence of a ſoul pierced with an-

* 2 Chron. iii. 1.

guiſh, thus reaſon — Could this poſſibly be the voice of God which I heard? or have ſome ſtrange impreſſions of the night deluded my fancy? Yes, —thy voice it was my God! How can thy ſervant deny it? with whom ſeven times before, thou haſt vouchſafed to commune in this vale of tears. When thou didſt firſt call me, out of the darkneſs of my father's houſe, into thy ſaving light; when thou didſt encourage me in the ſteps of my pilgrimage; when thou didſt furniſh me with plenty, and crown me with victory in a ſtrange land: and when thou didſt overload my feeble age, with joy in a rightful heir, did I aſcribe all to thee? And ſhall I now queſtion thy voice, when thou demandeſt but a part of thy own? No—my dear Iſaac—Heaven knows how much I love, nevertheleſs I will ſummon every effort to render thee, unto the Being from whom I had thee. Alas how ſweetly thou ſlumbereſt—little dreaming what change awaits thee: but I muſt diſturb thy reſt. When Jehovah calls, to delay is diſloyalty, to diſpute is rebellion. Iſaac, riſe, and call up my ſervants: bid them prepare for a journey, which we are to make unto the mount Moriah, and let ſome wood, proper for the burning of a ſacrifice be carried—mean while I ſhall walk out a little by myſelf, to behold the approach of morning, which ſurely moſt heavily in clouds, brings on the important day.

O ye

O ye ornaments of the ſky; who obey your Maker in the determinate order of your motions! —can man read his duty in a fairer volume? Why then ſtand I gazing here, inſtead of haſtening my ſervants, that I may execute his will? But ſtay— His will. Is that contrary to his juſtice? Did he not puniſh Cain for killing a brother? and can I imbrue my hands in the blood of my ſon, without offending his immortal Majeſty? Yes—why not? The act of Cain was from the malice of his heart; but I have a command from God himſelf. Is his command againſt all law? Did not the ſame God after the deluge, denounce this judgment, that whoſo ſheddeth man's blood, by man, ſhall his blood be ſhed? How then can I comply, without in fact diſobeying him?—O my trembling ſoul, what arguments doſt thou ſeek to cover thine own rebellious affections? Is there any warrant higher than his will? or any better interpreter of it than himſelf? Hold—if I deſtroy the root, how ſhall the bleſſing promiſed to this very child be accompliſhed? O Lord was not thy divine goodneſs pleaſed to accept my belief for righteouſneſs, and ſhall I now fruſtrate thy promiſes with my obedience? What—am I fallen into a new reluctance? Have I before this argued with thy juſtice? and ſhall I now diſpute thy power? Didſt thou create the light before the ſun, and ſhall I bind thee to the paſſions of a natural agent? Didſt thou not make

this

this all, of nothing? even by thy word, which is thy wiſdom; and foment all that thou haſt made, by thy Spirit, which is thy love: and ſhall I doubt, if thou canſt raiſe innumerable nations from the aſhes of my Iſaac? Did not I at firſt receive him, as it were from the dead? and art not thou the ſame everlaſting Father, full of compaſſion, who well knoweſt our frame? Pardon my confuſion; I am now going to ſet out; yet hear an humble ſuit, proceeding from the conflict in my breaſt. Take my child, and all that is mine:—he is mine no longer: only leſt my ſhaking hands, and fainting limbs ſhould be unfitted for the taſk, mayn't I uſe the inſtrumentality of another? How now my ſoul? doſt thou ſhrink in the laſt act of thy loyalty? Can I walk up and down about my ordinary functions, and when my God is to be ſerved, do my joints fail me? Have I humbled my deſires to his will? and ſhall I deny him the choice of his own inſtrument? O thou great author of life, who mighteſt have made me an inſenſible plant, a ſtone, or a poiſonous ſerpent; in either of which, I ſhould have conduced to the variety, or number of thy works; ſeeing thou haſt vouchſafed to breathe into me that ſpark of thy divine light, whereby I am led to comprehend in ſome meaſure, and acknowledge thy infinite ſovereignty over all nature. Do thou, O Eternal Maker and Mover, whoſe will is the firſt of cauſes, and whoſe glory

is

is the laſt of ends, direct my feet, to the place thou haſt appointed: ſtrengthen me to accompliſh thy pleaſure, and let heaven and earth obey thee. But the pre-requiſites to action muſt alſo be attended to, wherefore after his ſoliloquy he ſet out.

Verſe 3d. *And Abraham roſe up early in the morning, and ſaddled his aſs, and took two of his young men with him, and Iſaac his ſon; and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and roſe up, and went unto the place, of which God had told him.*

Tardineſs in the ſervice of God argues coldneſs, if not inſincerity. David ſomewhat piques himſelf, in not lingering like the ſlothful, but haſtily preparing to keep the commandments of his God. Abraham is ſo early, as if he meant to outſtrip the morning beams, in the execution of his taſk. He ſaddled the animal, which was to bear the utenſils for the work, took two of his young men with him for help, and attendance in the way; as far as either might be requiſite, and his ſon, the moſt valued of all his earthly enjoyments: in whoſe preſence, in mournful ſilence, he probably cut the wood, the fitteſt for a burnt-offering; leſt the mountain might be barren, or no dry wood found there. Sarah muſt have known a journey, and a ſacrifice was intended, but was a perfect ſtranger to the deſtined victim. Her faith not being equal to Abraham's: maternal love would never, ſave by force, have conſented to

part

part with its warmeſt object, and the Patriarch had enough to ſtruggle with, independent of her ſhrieks, therefore wiſely concealed the matter from her.

Whilſt they walked to the place, which Elohim told him of, or while they ſat down to refreſh themſelves by the way, what muſt have paſſed in the Patriarch's mind? what tumult in his thoughts? what ſwellings in his breaſt? How loſt in converſation?—what outrè replies at times to the amiable Iſaac's queries? — What ſtaring at his face? — What caution leſt Iſaac ſhould perceive him, and what trepidation when he did?

The dialogue of the young men muſt alſo have been embarraſſed, from the inexplicable end of their journey, when contraſted with what they might naturally diſcover in their Maſter. The Targum of Jonathan ſuppoſes theſe, to have been Iſhmael returning from the wilderneſs to viſit his father, and Eliezer. That the laſt was one of them is probable, but there is not the ſhadow of a probability, that the former was of the party. Whoever they were, might they not aſk—Why does our worthy Maſter ſeem to be under ſuch a preſſure of ſpirits? and why at ſuch pains to conceal the internal conflict?

Verſe 4th. *Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and ſaw the place afar off.*

A variety

A variety of conjectures have been made, whether, this ſpace of time contained two ſhort parts of a day, and one whole one: in order to render it, perfectly analogous to the time our Saviour reſted in the grave. Abraham was early up on the firſt day, which he travelled out—and the ſecond alſo, but how ſoon on the third he diſcovered the place is not ſpecified. The diſtance of Moriah from Beerſheba, occaſions this queſtion: ſome ſuppoſing it only one days journey—others reckon it forty miles, and many contend that it was twenty German miles, equal to ſixty of ours, and might well take up ſo much time to them on foot, for we believe the buſineſs was finiſhed on the third day.

The number, like the number ſeven is a myſtical one in Scripture, a few inſtances whereof, it may not be incurious to notice. Says Joſeph to the Butler, Yet within three days ſhall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and reſtore thee to thy place *. —And Joſeph ſaid unto them, the third day this do, and live, for I fear God †. Moſes's requeſt to the Egyptian Monarch was, leave for three days journey into the wilderneſs for to ſacrifice—and three days, they were therein, ere they found water to drink:—and three days journey the ark of the Lord's covenant went before them, to ſearch out a reſting place for them. Againſt the

* Gen. xl. 13. † Gen. xlii. 18.

third

third day the people were to be prepared to receive the law of God from Mount Sinai:—and after three days to paſs over Jordan into Canaan. On the third day King Hezekiah went up to the Lord's houſe, recovered as from death. It was the third day, before Eſther put on the royal apparel, and ſtood in the inner court of the King's houſe. Jonah was in the belly of the whale, three days and three knights. In a word, the Jews much obſerve this third day, and compare the paſſage with *—After two days, he will revive us, in the third day he will raiſe us up, and we ſhall live in his ſight: which they interpret of the reſurrection; and the deliverance of Iſaac, was certainly typical of Chriſt's reſurrection; for from the time, that Abraham had the command to offer up his ſon, he was reckoned by him no other than as one dead: from whence alſo ſaith Paul, he received him in a figure. To add no more, our Saviour, gives dignity to this myſtic number, when he ſays, Go ye, and tell that fox—Behold I caſt out devils, and I do cures to-day, and to-morrow; and the third day, I ſhall be perfected †.

—We are father told, Abraham ſaw the place afar off. Is it aſked—How did he know it? We reply—God had promiſed to ſhew it him: either by impreſſing his pious mind with the truth; or giving him ſome ſignal of it: which many think, was

* Hoſea, vi. 2. † Luke, xiii. 32.

a cloud

a cloud upon the mount, in conformity to which, the Targum of Jonathan ſaith, "And Abraham "lift up his eyes, and ſaw the cloud of glory "ſmoking on the mountain, and he knew it afar "off." Others ſay, he ſaw the glory of the divine Majeſty ſtanding upon the mountain, in a pillar of fire, reaching from earth to Heaven. By the phraſe afar off, we are to underſtand a diſtance, ſufficient to prevent the attendants, who were with them to hear, or ſee any thing of what was going on.

Verſe 5th. *And Abraham ſaid unto his young men—Abide ye here with the aſs; and I and the lad will go yonder, and worſhip, and come again to you.*

We have already glanced at the prudential reaſons, which he had for leaving the ſervants, under a poſitive injunction of keeping by the place, where he left them. However faithful in obeying his orders, they could not guard againſt a variety of ideas, which perplexed their converſation, eſpecially after the father and ſon ſet out.

I, and the lad or young man; Joſhua was called by this name at fifty-ſix years of age. And the Lord ſpake unto Moſes face to face, as a man ſpeaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp, but his ſervant Joſhua the ſon of Nun a young man departed not out of the tabernacle *. So far to ſatisfy the ſervants, he men-

* Exod. iii. 11.

tions

tions their intention, namely, we will worſhip, a word of very general ſignification, denoting ſometimes a leſſer, ſometimes a greater duty—at times an ordinary or common; at others an extraordinary and more ſolemn part of religion. That they underſtood a ſacrifice was meant, appears from the furniture they conducted, though they might well wonder about the victim. His ſaying —We will come again to you, merits ſingular notice. The ſame ſtrength of faith, which induced him to comply with the divine command, perſuaded him, that the Almighty not only could, but would raiſe him up again even from the aſhes. Therefore he thus ſpake, and propheſied of his return.

Hence let us learn, that in all our approaches to God, whatever we are conſcious will in the leaſt mar our enjoyments, or the propriety and perfection of our duty, muſt be left, as oft as either by prayer, ſpeaking, hearing, meditation, or communion at his table, we aſcend into the hill of God. The truly good cry for the influences of divine grace, to free them from incumbrances of whatever kind, that they may be active in keeping the commandments, and heavenly minded on all occaſions. The harder the taſk, the humbler ſubmiſſion, will they give to his revealed will, or the voice of his Providence concerning it. However much we may at times, be enraptured with the exerciſes

exerciſes of devotion; a return to the relative duties, and painful cares of life is neceſſary; in which caſe, as a reward for our chearful obedience to God, we perhaps ſhall find, events turn out more to our ſatisfaction, than we were aware of.

Verſe 6th. *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Iſaac his ſon; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife: and they went both of them together.*

The Patriarch takes the wood, and lays it on the ſon, which firſt ſuppoſes him able to bear the burden: and next indicates the willingneſs of the ſon to comply, from a conviction of its rectitude; becauſe otherwiſe, he had ſtrength enough, and help was near, to have fruſtrated the whole. Their young maſter's cry, whom they had ſeen ſo delicately brought up, ſo cheriſhed in the fathers boſom, would have fired the zeal, and added wings to the feet of the wondering attendants, at the foot of the mount.

Muſt they not be blind, or obſtinate indeed! who do not trace here the Eternal Father's laying the burden of ſinners on his ſon? Doth it not pierce the heart with the cry—I have found a ranſom, I have laid help on one mighty to ſave. And is not the reply as ſtrikingly condeſcending, yet more ſweetly affecting? Here am I O my God, to do thy will, I take delight, mine be the taſk to reconcile thy juſtice—magnify thy law—and glorify thy mercy.

To return. Who can worthily conceive the father's feelings, when he took the veſſel, in which was fire to light the wood in one hand, and a knife to ſlay the hallowed victim in the other. Methinks I hear irreproachable characters of every denomination, and from every quarter of the globe exclaim—The life which the Supreme Being gave, he may when he pleaſes reſume. For my country —I will glory to bleed:—for my parents,—for my children,—for my friend,—for my life,—for my liberty,—for my reputation,—for my property I will riſque it; when from conſcience I apprehend myſelf in duty bound ſo to do. In each of theſe cauſes, thouſands have braved the menaces of tyrants,—the horrors of the field,—and the more agonizing tortures of ſlow executions. But to embrue my hands in the blood of my own ſon,—I cannot, and millions would meet with the moſt univerſal approbation, and expect a forgiveneſs at laſt, were they to add, be the conſequences what they may—I will not.

Let it be after all remembered, that Abraham's was uncommon faith, which from its ſuperiority to the ſtrongeſt, the tendereſt, and moſt natural emotions of the human heart, never was ſo juſtly intitled to the appellation of being the gift of God, than on this awful emergency. Nor muſt we forget, that Iſaac through the whole of this buſineſs was powerfully aſſiſted by him, who worketh in us to will, and to do of his own good pleaſure.

Taking

Taking the point in this ſpiritual ſenſe, it argues no diminution of affection towards the ſons of promiſes, that they are made to bear a burden. It is not only their indiſpenſible duty to ſubmit, to whatever Divine Providence may require, but in imitation of holy Abraham, they muſt do; or with Iſaac bear their own part. In proportion as the glory of God is their ultimate object; will be the number and value of their endeavours to promote that end. Nor are they forſaken, or without many ſweet aſſurances from him, to follow whom they renounce all, that he will be with them; eſpecially, when ſuch attempts are made, in times of doubt or trouble.

Verſe 7th. *And Iſaac ſpake unto Abraham his father, and ſaid, My father, and he ſaid, Here am I my ſon. And he ſaid, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering.*

When the dutiful Iſaac at this moment, uſed the endearing word Father, ſay not ye clay-cold boſoms, who never felt the warmth of friendſhip's holy fire:—not ye deſpicable worldlings who, if your fortunes are ſafe, loſe your children almoſt with indifference; or if they are ſpared, ſacrifice that which makes them far more wretched, than if you had ſlain themſelves, even their honeſt attachments, to your ſordid avarice:—not ye who would rather have your offspring great, than good; or you, who to pamper the body, ſtarve the mind;

who, that they may have juſt ſo much after your death, grudge the expences of a liberal education. —Away all ſuch—But ſay ye, who count teaching the young ideas how to ſhoot—the rearing an immortal ſoul to happineſs and virtue, the higheſt, yet moſt pleaſant duties, which you owe your children. Who for your precious babes would brave pain, poverty, baniſhment, nay death.—Ye, who deſpiſe the world farther, than its treatment may affect them: and who allow all your other ſufferings however complicated, to be light, if they ſhare but a competency, though purchaſed by toil, raiſing them above the inſults of the affluent,—the neglect of the ſtranger, and the far more piercing ſhyneſs of the wretch, who in diſtreſs forſakes. It is yours, and ſuch like generous boſoms, full of the milk of human kindneſs, that we appeal to, for Abraham's feelings, when he anſwered—Here am I my ſon. Some Divines have been at pains to mark in the very expreſſion—Iſaac's ſimplicity, being in duty quite a child;—his humility denoted in this, when his age and circumſtances, might without cenſure have uſed greater freedoms: —and the propriety of his inquiring of his father, his ſenior in goodneſs, as well as in nature, concerning points of religious worſhip. From this queſtion of Iſaac's, we may conclude him, ſtill a ſtranger to the real deſign. Accuſtomed from his infancy to behold ſacrifices, he was well acquainted with the requiſites; therefore, when he

now

now more minutely, than perhaps he had done during the paſt part of their journey, conſidered the fire, the wood, and the knife, he might very pertinently aſk—where was the lamb? The Hebrew word ſignifieth either young ſheep or goat, witneſs, Your lamb ſhall be without blemiſh a male of the firſt year, ye ſhall take it out from the ſheep, or from the goats *.

Verſe 8th. *And Abraham ſaid, My ſon, God will provide himſelf a lamb for a burnt-offering, ſo they went both of them together.*

Some Jewiſh writers think, what we deem groundleſs, namely, that to the queſtion Abraham anſwered in expreſs terms, "My ſon thou art the lamb." So they went both of them together. The Targum of Jonathan ſays, they went both of them with a perfect heart, as one: which we own favours the above ſuppoſition, that Abraham here unfolded the whole to his ſon—the words intimating the readineſs of Iſaac, to aſſent to whatever his pious parent conceived, to be the revealed will of God. Nevertheleſs I rather apprehend, Abraham ſpake prophetically, ſpecifying the remunerative iſſue of his faith; that the Almighty would, as in fact he did, provide for a burnt-offering. At this period of the buſineſs, Abraham ſtayed both himſelf and ſon on Divine Providence, which ought never to be diſtruſted in the darkeſt moments, or the moſt imminent hazards.

* Exod. xii. 5.

Unto this act of the Patriarch's faith, the Sovereign of the Univerſe anſwers in the 13th verſe, and upon the conſequent act of Infinite Goodneſs, the place had its name, as we ſee in the 14th verſe. May we not ſafely conſtrue the words thus—My ſon, there will be revealed a ſubject fit for a burnt-offering. As it ſtands, we admit the reply not to be quite direct; while we contend it was an anſwer of truth, implying more than the ſpeaker thought of at the time; though not all he knew. It ſufficiently intimates the rending of a father's bowels for a dear ſon; whom he wiſhed to keep ignorant as long as poſſible, of the unparalleled diſcovery, that he himſelf by Divine command was the ſtipulated victim.

Whether Abraham underſtood it at preſent or not, matters little, nor leſſens the propriety of applying the whole to the Meſſiah, the lamb ſlain from the foundation of the world; of which Abraham ere he left the body, had a diſtant ſight, and ſtrong perſuaſion. Says the Redeemer, when reaſoning with the obſtinate Jews, Your father Abraham rejoiced to ſee my day, and he ſaw it, and was glad *. Thus Iſaac was the oblation in faith: —the ram was the burnt-offering in type:—and Chriſt the Lamb of God was the ſacrifice in truth. Finally, Abraham is not retarded by Iſaac's queſtion, nor is the ſon ſtartled by the ambiguity of the

* John, viii. 56.

parent's

parent's reply: each recollecting, that the diſpoſal of all events belonging to Infinite Wiſdom, was the beſt ſolution to things difficult in themſelves; or which were apt to create mental diſquietude.

Another remark might occur, that the Supreme Governor of the Univerſe always injoined, and provided the ſacrifices, the moſt pleaſing to himſelf.

Verſe 9th. *And they came to the place which God had told him of, and Abraham built an altar, and laid the wood in order, and bound Iſaac his ſon, and laid him on the altar on the wood.*

In addition to what hath been already ſaid of the place, the aſſertion of the Mahometans is, that Muna about three miles from Mecca, is the place where Abraham went to offer up Iſaac, and therefore in this place, they ſacrifice their ſheep. No ſooner had they reached it, than Abraham in conjunction with his ſon built an altar. His filial breaſt could not brook ſtanding idle; ſeeing an aged parent ſo anxiouſly buſy. Adored be the wiſdom, that conceals futurity from man! for did he foreſee what was to happen, the wretchedneſs of the majority, would ſoon prove the diſſolution of ſociety. O amiable youth, unwittingly thou helped to rear thy funeral pile!—Why an altar? We anſwer, the Patriarch's faith led him to obſerve the will of God, in the performance of his own work. Such he had commanded to be made of earth, as the law afterwards declared; and alſo

to ſanctify the ſacrifice, as our Saviour informs us, Ye fools, and blind; for whether is greater the gift, or the altar that ſanctifieth the gift *.

Never had Abraham been engaged in ſuch dreadful work before—Without detracting from the merit of his faith—Did not his melting heart cry—Alas my Iſaac, was it for this I received thee by ſpecial promiſe, and contrary to the common courſe of nature?—Nature why did I name that word?—Hold, I can no more!—Angels away—you cannot aſſiſt me!—Thou covenant-keeping God,—ſole object of my worſhip, and centre of my deſires—Thou guide of my youth,—and preſerver of my days—aid, O aid me in this, the moſt critical moment of my exiſtence! No longer will I conceal thy awful command—or withhold the ſecret from my ſon, the joy of my eyes and pride of my heart. I know his intrinſic goodneſs and unſullied virtue: yet death is a trying ſcene, and to think of ſtanding at the tribunal of the Omnipotent, is a ſoul-ſearching idea. The very beſt need every poſſible recollection, and the utmoſt preparation, wherefore I will now apprize him. Iſaac,—Oh! how ſhall I in words announce the warrant, and diſcloſe the bloody purpoſe!—I ſay,—my deareſt Iſaac,—look at me,—my eyes,—what means this,—they grow dim,—and retreat from the ſight they were wont to behold with the

* Math. xxiii. 19.

moſt

moſt tranſporting rapture,—My tongue why faulters thou?—Why ſmite my knees againſt one another!—My ſon,—doſt thou not imagine ſomething unheard of in the annals of mankind; ſomething beyond expreſſion momentous, labours in my breaſt. Yes. Thou art the victim. Silence enſued,—excruciating pauſe,—at intervals the father ſpake,—opened to his teachable and ſuſceptible mind the will of God; and contrary to natural affection, perſuades him to reſignation. It was long before Iſaac ſpake—a mighty conflict warred within. For the wiſeſt purpoſes, the Creator hath ordered the love of life to be ſtrong. If the Saviour himſelf did pray,—Father if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from me, ere his love to ſave ſinners induced him to add, nevertheleſs, not my will, but thine be done; may we not be allowed to ſuppoſe, that at firſt Iſaac's feelings rather recoiled:—he caſt a look, a fond look back to Sarah, and all the indearments he had left, and was for ever to loſe.—Might I not have bade, without offending God, an honoured mother farewel. His faith however prevails, and his uniform obedience to his father, returned in full force. In meekneſs and acquieſcence, he ſtood inwardly reflecting,—die I muſt,—far better to do it under the ſanction of a divine command; than by diſobedience, drag on for a few years more, a miſerable life, forſaken of God, and die at laſt under loads of accumulated guilt, and the ſenſe of his hotteſt diſpleaſure.

Under

Under the ſacred impreſſion of this idea, though I might reſiſt, I will not. The wondrous compliance in the ſon, muſt have ſtaggered nature in the parent more: had he not wiſely conſidered, ſuch obedience could only be produced by grace, whence he himſelf derived the greater ſtrength. Yet,—what had been all my flocks compared to this!—Muſt I too be the prieſt!—Ah! what will the world ſay? They will never believe me, when I tell them, it was by thy order. What will Sarah ſay? Dare I ſee her face again? Will ſhe not call me monſter, and ſhun the hateful ſight? Can we err in religion, when we plead for humanity? I hope not: wherefore may we not ſuppoſe the fully informed, and perfectly reſigned Iſaac to ſay to his parent,—Strong hath been thy faith:—amazing thy reſerve, and preſence of mind hitherto,—I am ſatisfied that the certainty of any thing's being the will of God, conveys indiſpenſible duty to the creature; and that what the Almighty hath promiſed, he will take his own way and time to perform.

Abraham on this perceiving ſupernatural aſſiſtance given to his ſon, as clearly as ſovereign authority in the original mandate, diſpoſes the wood in the propereſt manner for the mournful ſervice, binds his ſon, and lays him on the altar on the wood.

Verſe 10th. *And Abraham ſtretched forth his hand and took the knife to ſlay his ſon.*

Things

Things being in this ſituation, nothing remained, but to ſlay the victim. Abraham deaf to the calls of nature, with manly,—with more than manly firmneſs graſped the knife:—raiſed his arm, and was juſt going to give the fatal thruſt, which was carrying obedience to the ultimate point. In his mind the deed was done, and in Iſaac the bitterneſs of death was truly paſt: when Heaven in mercy interpoſed;—ere we examine which, hear the ſentiments of two Apoſtles on the ſubject. —By faith Abraham, when he was tried offered up Iſaac, and he that had received the promiſes, offered up his own begotten ſon; of whom it was ſaid, that in Iſaac ſhall thy ſeed be called *.—Was not Abraham our father juſtified by works, when he had offered Iſaac his ſon upon the altar? Seeſt thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect. And the ſcripture was fulfilled which ſaith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteouſneſs. And he was called the friend of God †.

Verſe 11th. *And the Angel of the Lord called to him out of Heaven, and ſaid Abraham, Abraham. And he ſaid—Here am I.*

This was the uncreated Angel of the covenant, as appears from his ſwearing by himſelf in the 16th verſe of the chapter, and renewing the promiſe. The repetition of the name, denotes eagerneſs to

* Heb. xi. 17, 18. † James, ii. 21, 22, 23.

prevent

prevent, what otherwiſe would have been done. And the Patriarch's anſwer, implies every thing expreſſive of the Hero, unconnected with the parent, and characteriſtical of the ſaint, viz. courage, and readineſs, joined to the greateſt prudence and compoſure. The common nature of the adage, detracts not from its truth, that the time of our extremity, is frequently that of God's opportunity. —He is not fartheſt from us, when we leaſt diſcern him. Oftener would we find this to our comfort, did we leſs diſtruſt him.

Verſe 12th. *And he ſaid, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him, for now I know that thou feareſt God, ſeeing thou haſt not withheld thy ſon, thine only ſon from me.*

The ſame powers who gave the injunction, now commands thee not to hurt, much leſs to kill thy ſon: becauſe now I know thou feareſt Elohim, with the moſt genuine love, its nobleſt ſource; having given the higheſt poſſible proof, that mere man can give. Thy virtues have ſtood the ſevereſt trial, and ſhall be as eminently rewarded. Thy obedience evidences the moſt ſuperlative awe of my Infinite Majeſty; including every part or principle of internal piety; eager to diſplay itſelf in every external act of religious worſhip. Thy faith hath completely triumphed over the hardeſt obſtacles, which could have been thrown in its way:—it ſhall be remembered while ſun and moon endure:—nations yet unborn ſhall conſider thy boſom, as the

ſeat

ſeat of bliſs, and countleſs ages after this world ſhall be diſſolved, thy friendſhip with thy God ſhall be tranſporting to thy ſoul, and but as it were beginning to begin. Looſe thy Iſaac—embrace him as thine again—receive him with a double bleſſing, imparting rivers of delight, ſuperior to thoſe thou taſted on firſt obtaining him. Hail Iſaac! highly favoured of Heaven:—thou prodigy of paſſive obedience, art not thou now a ſon of joy indeed?

Trouble not our preſent ſenſations, with thoſe frivolous queries which Infidelity is apt to put: ſuch as,—Why God would not have Iſaac offered, when he had commanded it? The will of the Almighty is anſwer ſufficient to the believers in revelation; while to mankind at large, let us add; it was to prove the Patriarch's faith, and though an extraordinary command; yet ultimately broke, none of his revealed law, or the laws of nature. He, from exuberant compaſſion to his creatures, ſpeaks and works ſometimes after the manner of men, to try their fidelity, and give the greater luſtre to their religious character. To aſcertain and effect this, is the grand ſcope of adverſity. The maintaining our principles and firmneſs in this furnace, eſtabliſhes our denomination, whether as ſaints or ſinners: which end is no ſooner gained, than the beams of comfort dawn, and ſtrength is felt. We are alſo taught hereby, that the Sovereign Lord of worlds delights not in human blood; conſequently, that

that the origin of ſuch ſacrifices, is ignorance of the true God.

Verſe 13th. *And Abraham lifted up up his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind him, a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went, and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering, in the ſtead of his ſon.*

Surely the word was now verified which he ſpake to Iſaac,—My ſon God will provide a lamb. It was Providence which directs every circumſtance, that brought the creature into that place, and ſituation; probable a wanderer from ſome flock; at a conſiderable diſtance on the plain, or driven to the deſert mount, by ſome beaſt of prey. Lamb, being a general word for the young of the ſpecies, argues no inconſiſtency with Abraham's prophecy, that it was in fact a ram: Or the Patriarch might mean no more by the expreſſion, than either that, or ſome animal fit for ſacrifice. Some writers think, that the voice of the Angel ſounding as it were behind him: Abraham turning round to ſee the glorious perſonage firſt beheld the ram: but is it not full as reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the awful work kept the Patriarch's eye too intent upon his ſon, to ſee any thing around him, till when the danger was over, and greater calmneſs took place, the animal's ſtruggling to get free from the thicket, might by the ruſtling among the briars, direct Abraham's eyes that way, who eagerly went and took him,—bound him,—diſpatched him,—and made

made him aſcend in a burnt-offering inſtead of his ſon. Never with ſuch a thankful gladſome heart, had the Patriarch ſacrificed before: or Iſaac ever aſſiſted with more exſtaſy, and heart-felt devotion. Was there ever among the ſons of men, a pair of more humble adorers of the Infinite Majeſty of Heaven and Earth, than they were at that moment?

The ram hath its name from ſtrength in the Hebrew. This, with all the other parts relative to this buſineſs, alludes to Chriſt the lamb without blemiſh, the ſeverity of whoſe ſufferings and death, were in the room of every ſpiritual Iſaac, in all ages, and under all diſpenſations, whereof the family of God, as the Apoſtle terms it, conſiſts. Either they muſt die, according to the penalty of the firſt covenant; or ſome one for them able to pay the debt, and procure a full diſcharge, and none will anſwer the end, none can finiſh tranſgreſſion, make an end of ſin, and bring in an everlaſting righteouſneſs, ſave the immaculate lamb of the Eternal Father's providing, whoſe infallible ſpirit taught the young orator of old to ſay, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ranſom *

It is pleaſing to remark, how much in agreement with ſacred hiſtory, Polyhiſter a heathen writer, hath in a few words told this affair. God

* Job. xxxiii. 24.

ſays

ſays he commanded Abraham, to offer up his ſon Iſaac to him for a burnt-offering, and taking the lad with him to a mountain, laid and kindled a heap of wood, and put Iſaac upon it, and when he was about to ſlay him, was forbidden by an Angel, who preſented a ram to him for ſacrifice, and then Abraham removed his ſon from the pile, and offered up the ram.

Verſe 14th. *And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh, as it is ſaid to this day, in the mount of the Lord it ſhall be ſeen.*

This name imports according to the Septuagint —The Lord hath ſeen the obedience of his ſervant, and rewarded accordingly; ſince he thus remarkably anſwered to Abraham's prediction: the perpetual memory of his mercy, was kept up in the very name of the place. Morijah, the name of the mountain is of like interpretation, the name Jehovah being ſhortened into Jah. Abraham, and O with what ſincerity and fervor would his Iſaac join, prayed, and ſerved God there in that place, and ſolemnly ſaid before the Moſt High, here ſhall the faithful in future periods ſerve, and laud his venerable name, whoſe goings forth in the ways of love and mercy to his creatures, have been from everlaſting. Who doth not in this, perceive a forcible application to the temple built afterwards on this mount by Solomon? Moſes called his altar, Jehovah-Niſſi:—The Lord my

banner, and Jeruſalem by the prophet Ezekiel, is called Jehovah Shammah.

The expreſſion in our tranſlation, "it ſhall be ſeen" the evangelical, and claſſical Hervey ſays, he never could make ſenſe of, chuſing rather to read thus, In the mount, the Lord will be ſeen, or the Lord will provide. In point of ſentiment there is ſcarce a difference. However conformable to the original this may be, permit me to maintain, that even according to our tranſlation it is ſenſe, and good ſenſe too, which that amiable Divine, had he conſidered the whole clauſe muſt have admitted. We grant in the days of the inſpired writer, there was nothing relative to the tranſaction to be ſeen; nay, perhaps the firſt heavy rains afterwards, deſtroyed the ſmalleſt veſtiges of the altar. The mount, and that not ſimply conſidered as a mount,—or as Mount Moriah,—but as the mount of the Lord,—here lies the ſtreſs,—for the ſame letters with the variation of the points, will make either an active or paſſive ſenſe, denoting, that God doth both ſee, and provide ſecretly for his, and alſo is evidently ſeen coming to their ſuccour, in their greateſt neceſſities. Wherever men are led in the direct path of their duty, according to the will of God, there, and in that caſe, it ſhall be ſeen, that he will never forſake thoſe, who put their truſt in him. Whence it is plain, that as God appeared to Abraham, and for his virtuous ſon, ſo he will interpoſe for the righteous, and diſplay his power

and goodneſs to his people of all ages and denominations, in every time of difficulty and diſtreſs, according to his gracious declaration. When thou paſſeſt through the waters I will be with thee, and when through the rivers they ſhall not overflow thee, when thou walkeſt through the fire thou ſhalt not be burnt, neither ſhall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Iſrael thy Saviour *. Of every ſincere worſhipper of the Almighty, it may be ſaid, as by the mouth of the ſame Prophet, Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whoſe mind is ſtayed on thee: becauſe he truſteth in thee. Truſt ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength †.

Thus, we have briefly gone through the particulars of this intereſting tranſaction: which hath been placed in a variety of views by eminent writers. There are who apprehend, that the account, which Sanchoniathon gives of Chronus or Saturn, ſacrificing his ſon, refers to this affair of Abraham's. His words are, "There being a "peſtilence and a mortality, Chronus offered up "his only ſon, a whole burnt-offering to his fa-"ther Ouranos;" which Porphyry from the ſame hiſtorian thus relates. "Cronus, whom the Phe-"nicians call Iſrael, a grandſon of Abraham's, "thought, through miſtake, to be put for Abra-

* Iſa. xliii. 2, 3. † Iſa. xxvi. 3, 4.

"ham

" ham himſelf, having an only ſon of a nymph " of that country, called Anabret, which accord- " ing to Bochart ſignifies one, that is conceived " by grace, whom therefore, ſays our hiſtorian, " they called jeoud, the ſame with jehid, the " name given to Iſaac, an only one. When the " country was in great danger through war, the " father offered this ſon, dreſſed in a royal habit " on an altar, which he had prepared." The idea here ſtated reſpecting the conception, coincides very well with the ſacred context, Through faith alſo, Sarah herſelf received ſtrength to conceive ſeed, and was delivered of a child, when ſhe was paſt age, becauſe ſhe judged him faithful who had promiſed *. Many, diſcern no ſimilarity between theſe two caſes, and ſcarce will allow the one to be a corruption of the other.

Be this as it may, need I aſk the believers in divine revelation, for permiſſion to ſuppoſe, what we have already hinted; that ere Abraham and Iſaac left the mount, their hearts and voices would join in the moſt rapturous adoration of his infinite perfections, whoſe tender mercies are over all his works. With what elevated notions of Providence, earneſt attachment to religion, and warm zeal for the glory of God, would they return, and tell Sarah of every circumſtance, the ſtate of whoſe ſoul, during the narration, is not to be de-

* Heb. xi. 11.

ſcribed. No doubt Abraham told it, with the utmoſt conjugal tenderneſs, yet her emotions muſt alternately have been greater, than her frame could well ſupport. Nor to her only, but to the family, nay to all around, would father and ſon unite, in publiſhing the amazing deliverance, which the Lord had wrought.

In like manner thoſe ſaved by grace, with aſtoniſhment conſider the death, they, by a Saviour are delivered from, and while with grateful hearts, they bind their ſacrifices to the horns of his altar, proclaim his righteouſneſs abroad, and truſt in it only. With David they cry, Come near all ye that fear God, and I will tell you, what he hath done for my ſoul.

The language of the whole tranſaction is, as if God had ſaid—Ye children of men, hear you, what my faithful ſervant and friend, hath done upon this mountain, in chearfully ſacrificing his only ſon, to teſtify his love to me. By the ſame method I will declare my love to a periſhing world; by giving my only begotten ſon a ſacrifice for ſin. In this mountain ſhall the ſword of juſtice awake againſt him by his own conſent; and what has now been done only in a figure, ſhall be really tranſacted at the appointed time. Hence the intimation, that a human ſacrifice would be offered up; that the atonement might be made in the nature which had offended: and owing to the corruption of this intimation, aroſe the horrid cuſtom among

among the heathens, of offering up human victims to their imaginary deities. In oppoſition to which, the divine injunction ran, let rams and other beaſts be immolated, as types of that bleeding Lamb, where one perfect oblation taketh away the ſins of the world. Ye mountains of Moriah! your name may now be Jehovah-Jireh, for better reaſons, than when the ram was caught in your thickets: for God hath of his infinite mercy provided a lamb without ſpot or blemiſh; and on the horrid eminence of Calvary, hath been ſhed that precious blood, which procures acceſs to the lovely heights of Zion.

Every one knows, that both Abraham and Iſaac were eminent types of Chriſt, and numberleſs parallels both from the pulpit, and the preſs have been drawn. God promiſed to Abraham a ſeed, and the land of Canaan as an inheritance to them. So he ſaith to Chriſt, that he ſhall ſee his ſeed, to whom is reſerved an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled in the world of light above. Abraham was a type of Chriſt in his obedience to the will of God:—leaving his father's houſe:—ſubmitting to the painful ordinance of circumciſion;—and in offering up his only ſon Iſaac. Whatever God requires, Abraham performs. As God tried Abraham in his Iſaac, ſo will he try every ſon of Abraham, in what is deareſt to him.

Iſaac was a type of Chriſt in his birth, which was not by the power of nature, but by virtue of

the promiſe of God. Iſaac was the ſeed of the promiſe, in whom all nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed. Chriſt was the promiſed ſeed, in whom alone we are, or can be truly bleſſed: and born not according to the courſe of nature, but by the over-ſhadowing power of the Holy Ghoſt. An Angel revealed the birth of Iſaac to Sarah:—and perhaps, the very ſame perſonage, announced the Saviour's birth to Mary. From the firſt promiſe of a ſeed made to Abraham, to the birth of Iſaac, there elapſed five and twenty years; the Patriarch being ſeventy-five years of age when he left Haran, and an hundred when Iſaac was born. Long was the Meſſiah expected: ſeeing from the firſt promiſe to his coming in the fleſh, were almoſt four thouſand years.

Iſaac was a type of Chriſt in his ſufferings and death. Without reſiſtance he yields himſelf to his father, even unto death; may be affirmed of both: each was led away like a lamb to the ſlaughter, and as a ſheep before her ſhearers is dumb, ſo neither of them opened their mouth, that is to rebel. Iſaac carried the wood, whereon he was bound, to Moriah—Chriſt carried the croſs to Golgotha. When Iſaac was to be offered, the ſervants were left behind at the foot of the hill:—And Jeſus trod the wine preſs of the Father's wrath, his diſciples being fled, and ſcattered from him. Iſaac was offered on Mount Moriah, and there was the temple

ple built, a type of Chriſt's body, and on another part of the ſame mountain was his body crucified.

Iſaac's deliverance was a type of Chriſt's reſurrection. In the courſe of three days, which intervened between paſſing of the ſentence, and the reverſing of it in one ſenſe, Iſaac was a dead man: the truth of which figure is in Chriſt, who actually died, and verily roſe again on the third day, proclaiming to admiring Angels, and attentive men, as in *, I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Like Iſaac, our Glorious Immanuel returned triumphantly to his Father's houſe, from whence he came, and as the former exactly fulfilled the promiſe, of becoming a Father of many nations; ſo the latter, is become the ſpiritual head, of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named; of thoſe who are begotten again unto a lively hope, by his reſurrection from the dead, and through the ſanctification of the ſpirit, and a belief of the truth.

Finally, did the Jews name their yearly feaſt upon the firſt of Tizri or September, called the memorial of blowing of trumpets, alſo the binding of Iſaac, in remembrance of this tranſaction. And ſhall we, the profeſſing followers of Jeſus,

* Rev. i. 18.

forget the nailing of him to the croſs, by whoſe ſtripes, we are healed of all our ſpiritual maladies; and through whoſe perfect atonement only, we can be accepted of God, and enter the manſions of glory. Inſtead of an yearly, or monthly commemoration, may our faith continually contemplate the tragical ſcene, at which the ſun ſtarted back, nor would behold his ſuffering Maker: and may the momentous truths therewith connected, be engraven on our heart, and ſhed a balmy, and a powerful influence, over every part of our behaviour.

From the example of the holy Patriarch, let us endeavour to acquire more reſignation to the will of God, aſſured, that he will either reſtore what we chearfully devote to him, or grant us bleſſings more divine. How often by our murmuring do we loſe the promiſed comfort, and amidſt the intricate mazes of life, like the Iſraelites of old, refuſe to ſtir though the voice of Providence loudly calls, go on? The afflictions which for the moſt part we ſuffer, are but the natural reſult of our own peeviſhneſs of temper, and want of reliance on the Almighty. We conſult with Sarah, inſtead of acquieſcing in the divine precept: and when he reſumes the gifts he gave, frequently complain as thoſe without hope: O Heavenly Father as we hold every thing by the tenure of thy ſovereign pleaſure, may we through divine grace be ſtrengthened,

ened, ſo to improve them; that in all things, thy glory may be promoted, and when called to reſign them, may we do it in the ſpirit of thoſe, who ſtedfaſtly look at the recompence of eternal reward, through Chriſt. Amen and Amen.

EXPO-

EXPOSITION II.

From GEN. XXXII. and laſt Nine Verſes.

And Jacob was left alone: and there wreſtled a man with him, until the breaking of the day. And when he ſaw that he prevailed not againſt him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wreſtled with him. And he ſaid, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he ſaid, I will not let thee go, except thou bleſs me. And he ſaid unto him, What *is* thy name? And he ſaid, Jacob. And he ſaid, Thy name ſhall be called no more Jacob, but Iſrael: for as a prince haſt thou power with God and with men, and haſt prevailed. And Jacob aſked *him*, and ſaid, Tell *me*, I pray thee, thy name: And he ſaid, Wherefore *is* it, *that* thou doſt aſk after my name? and he bleſſed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have ſeen God face to face, and my life is preſerved. And as he paſſed over Penuel, the ſun roſe upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Iſrael eat not *of* the ſinew which ſhrank, which *is* upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: becauſe he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, in the ſinew that ſhrank.

IN that firſt diſobedience of man, which brought death into the world, and all our woe, is implied, the neceſſity of a Mediator, whoſe incarnation was foretold, in his being called, the firſt time he

he ever was named to man, the ſeed of the woman. He was by lineal deſcent to be the ſon of Adam. But idolatry ſoon began to ſpread over the face of the earth, and therefore of the true worſhippers of the one God, a particular branch was choſen, from which the Meſſiah in fullneſs of time ſhould ariſe. Thus Seth was preferred, to wicked and bloody-minded Cain: and in the family of Noah, the promiſe was reſtricted to the deſcendants of Shem. Of his poſterity was Abraham rightly called, the father of the faithful, who preſerved in his family the true religion, and to whom the promiſe was again renewed. With his ſon Iſaac, in like manner, did the Almighty enter into Covenant, and confirmed the bleſſings he had promiſed to his father, by way of eminence, called the friend of the Moſt High God. As Abraham lived in the midſt of idolaters, with any of whoſe daughters, it would have been improper to have joined his ſon; he orders his truſty ſervant to go, and as Providence ſhould direct, bring a wife for him, from among his own kindred. He went,—he was ſucceſsful, and made his young maſter happy, in the poſſeſſion of Rebekah, to whom the parting bleſſing, or rather farewell wiſh of her grieved relatives, was really verified,—Be thou, ſaid they, the mother of thouſands of millions, and let thy ſeed poſſeſs the gate of thoſe who hate them. Her firſt children were twins, Eſau and Jacob, the former of which was his father's favourite,

vourite, but the latter, not only beloved by his mother, but alſo by the Eternal King. Jacob ſupplanted his brother in purchaſing his birth-right; on which action, when Eſau more ſeriouſly reflected, added, to his having afterwards by fraud deprived him of his father's beſt bleſſing, it raiſed reſentment in his boſom againſt him, and made him reſolve on revenge.

The partial mother, anxious for her darling child, and conſcious of the deep part, ſhe herſelf had acted in the buſineſs, immediately concluded him the object of thoſe frowns, and the cauſe of that diſcontent, which ſhe read ſo plainly, in the looks and manner, of her eldeſt ſon Eſau. A ſpeech of his occaſionally dropt, coming to her ears, confirmed this opinion, and prompted her to ſend Jacob among her own relations, out of the reach of his brother's anger. Obedient to her command, being again bleſſed of his father, whom he ſaw no more, and charged by him not to marry an idolater, he left his father's houſe, rather in a way unſuitable to his birth, as modern maxims would ſuggeſt, without any ſervant to attend him. Muſing no doubt upon a variety of articles, ſometimes recalling the endearments he had left; and ſometimes melancholy under the idea of the inconveniences he might meet with; he purſued his journey, while the ſun was up. Night coming on interrupted it, and his tired limbs demanded reſt. Indeed a coarſe night's lodging he had, if fleſh

and

and ſenſe were Umpires of the caſe. No other bed, than the verdant turf, no ſofter pillow than the ſtones of the field, or perhaps the trunk of a tree, nor any covering ſave the azure curtains of the ſky; this ſolitary traveller truſting to the integrity of his heart, and the purity of his manners, laid himſelf down, after an humble meal, ſweetened by a draught from ſome murmuring brook, and without thoſe fears which diſturb the guilty breaſt, committed his protection, to the Great Guardian of Nature.

Mark the conſequence—Here he was viſited by the ever-bleſſed God, who comforted him, ſtrengthened him, and encouraged him to proceed, never to diſtruſt divine Providence; or be too much diſmayed with the viciſſitudes of life. His diſquietudes concerning his own future lot, were removed, by his being told, that from him a great nation ſhould ariſe. Having awoke, he acknowledged the Lord was in that place, not that he was ignorant of his immenſity and omnipreſence, but that ſpecial manifeſtations of divine favour had been made to him, which filled him with inward compoſure, and fortified him againſt every danger or external fear. With freſh ſpirits he gets on his way, after he had poured out his oriſons to his God, for the ordinary, and extraordinary bleſſings of the night. Theſe being of ſuch a nature as required ſpecial memorials, he conſecrated his pillows, as tokens of his gratitude. A truly good heart

heart can never be ungrateful, either to God or man. Providence directed him to reſt probably about noon, or towards evening, as the cattle were going to be watered, at a place where he had the firſt glance of her, who was afterwards his beſt loved wife. It frequently happens, that apparent accident, or chance, gives many faithful couples, the firſt ſight of each other. A pointed attention to the little cares and concerns of a female, is no bad introduction to her eſteem. Jacob rolled away the ſtone, he helped Rachel to water her father's cattle, and ſhe haſted to tell Laban the tidings, which he had communicated. All this ſeems to have taken place on the ſecond day, after his departure from his father's houſe, whence we learn the diſtance was but ſhort, and better accounts, for ſo fond a mother permitting him to go unattended.

Laban, however deficient in the practice of juſtice, like many modern characters, was by no means a ſtranger to frankneſs and hoſpitality. The near ties of blood, alſo produced ſuitable marks of regard. A ſpecious zeal, often conceals the want of that principle, which it pretends. With a plauſible ſhew of equity, he aſks him after a month's ſtay, why, becauſe he was his brother he ſhould ſerve him for nought? Animated by a deſire of the object, which had recently ſtruck him, he engages to ſerve ſeven years for Rachel, a proof of love, which few in theſe degenerate

days would chuſe to give, and yet ſo ſtrong was his affection, that when, owing to the cuſtoms of the land, he met with a diſappointment, of the cruelleſt kind, to a heart fraught with ſenſibility, he conſented to ſerve ſeven more. He was ſoon the father of a flouriſhing family, though in that point alſo, Providence taught him, that our warmeſt expectations, are often contrary to its purpoſes; or being immoderate, are wiſely counteracted by its ſovereign diſpoſals. His beloved Rachel was barren, while neglected Leah produced him, the ſtrongeſt ties of conjugal affection. He was not more favoured in his family, than in his ſubſtance, which in the firſt ages of ſociety principally conſiſted in cattle. He was now a wealthy ſhepherd, no deſpicable profeſſion, nay, almoſt the only one, in thoſe Eaſtern climes.

After bearing with a variety of ill uſage from Laban, who began to grow jealous of him, while after all, he outwitted him in his own ſubtlety; at the expreſs command of the Almighty, he ſet out with his whole family and property to his native country, to reviſit his kindred, and ſettle amongſt them. The cup of proſperity, is always leſs or more, daſhed with bitters. It was not Laban's fraudulent practices, nor the frequent diſputes he had with him, but an action of his beloved Rachel's, which had nearly proved fatal to him. From earthly favourites, whether perſons or things, danger generally enſues; becauſe the having ſuch, implies,

implies, an overweening attachment. Jacob knew not of it,—yet he ſuffers,—for Laban purſues him, chides him bitterly, and would have behaved ſtill ruder, had he found his Teraphim, or houſhold Gods.

A compromiſe having taken place, they parted in a friendly, but ſolemn manner, indicative of their amity, and as a witneſs, againſt whoſoever ſhould break the reſpective obligations, which their profeſſions at that time implied, they took ſtones, and erected a pillar as a memorial of the deed. The one returned home, the other proceeded on his journey, and was met by the Angels of God: not in a dream, or airy phantom of imagination; but for his real comfort and encouragement, in a ſpiritual ſenſe. Here, they were not ſimply meſſengers, but anſwered their nobler deſcription, of miniſtring ſpirits, ſtanding around the throne of God, ready at his word, to execute his purpoſes towards the heirs of ſalvation. Theſe are now ſent to viſit him after his conflict with Laban, and before his meeting with Eſau, that the Patriarch might be aſſured of protection for himſelf, and the ſtill dearer objects of his affection; his wives and children. See Chriſtian, the ſecurity of the true worſhippers of God,—One of thoſe ſpirits in a night diſpatched 185,000 of the Aſſyrian army; yet an hoſt of them is ſent to guard the Patriarch. The Angel of the Lord, ſays David, encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth

them. In corroboration of this, witneſs the caſe of Eliſha, And Eliſha prayed, and ſaid, Lord I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may ſee *. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he ſaw: and behold the mountain was full of horſes, and chariots of fire round about Eliſha. The heathen world had ſome faint idea of this point; ſince Heſiod ſays, there be thrice ten thouſand of ſubordinate deities here upon earth, keepers of mortal men, and obſervers of their works, both juſt and unjuſt. In a word, they are miniſters, either of the Almighty's love, as we learn from Scripture: For he ſhall give his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways †: Or of his vengeance, as is evident from ‡—For we will deſtroy this place: becauſe the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord hath ſent us to deſtroy it.

We are informed, that when Jacob ſaw them, which probably none of his company did, but himſelf, he ſaid, This is God's hoſt or camp, from their number, their ſtrength, or the regular guard which they formed around him, wherefore he called the place Mahanaim, which being of the dual number, denotes two hoſts or armies, the one before, and the other behind: or the one on the one ſide, and the other on the other. Of Jacob, and his company: whichever way they arranged them-

* 2 Kings, vi. 17. † Pſal. xci. 11. ‡ Gen. xix. 13.

ſelves

ſelves is a point of no moment, ſeeing the great end was gained, in aſſuring the anxious Patriarch of real ſafety. About this place afterwards, there was a city called Mahanaim, inhabited by Prieſts, as we learn from Joſhua—nor was a guard of this kind limited to Jacob, but is alſo manifeſtly applied to the Church of God. Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye ſee in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies *.

Notwithſtanding all the inſtances of divine favour, Jacob knew well that means were to be uſed. Thoſe the leaſt entitled to the protection of heaven, generally neglect theſe the moſt. The remembrance of Eſau's reſentment, had not dropt from his mind; he was aware, that though anger could not dwell in the heart of a good, yet it lived long in that of a bad character. He of courſe dreaded its continuance, prudently ſent meſſengers to him, becauſe he had to paſs his country in his return to Canaan, who ſhould intreat his favour, and report the temper he was in. With admirable dexterity, he taught them a conciliating form of addreſs. Figure then his amazement, when they reported, that he came to meet him with four hundred men. At this time the intentions of Eſau were certainly hoſtile, as Jacob conjectured. The emotions of conjugal and parental affection now

* Cant. vi. 13.

triumph over all other feelings:—The Angels are gone, and his incenſed brother cometh with an army, that inſpired greater terror, than the other had probably given comfort, to take revenge for a wrong of twenty years ſtanding. Thus the Almighty by interchanging the ſprings of joy and fear, guides the truly good, that they may neither deſpair in diſtreſs, nor preſume in proſperity. In this extremity the holy man goes to prayer, and having poured out his requeſts to God, he divides his company and flocks, into ſeparate parties; which that night he made to paſs over the ford Jabbok, the name of a river, ariſing out of Arabia, and watering the region of the Ammonites.

Verſe 24th. *And Jacob was left alone, and there wreſtled a man with him, untill the breaking of the day.*

Some have been idle enough to diſpute, which ſide of the ford he himſelf was on, which is a matter of no great conſequence. Moſt probably it was the eaſt ſide of the brook, therefore the oppoſite one to that, whereon his wives and children were; for undoubtedly he wiſhed to be private, that he might have the better opportunity, with freedom to pour out the anguiſh of his ſoul, to the Great Hearer of Requeſts. O loſt to ſenſe and pious thought indeed! who think it ſolitude to be alone. Thoſe of a refined caſt, diſdain to ſhew the expreſſions of genuine attachments before

fore the vulgar herd: and are no leſs careful before others, that might enter into them, becauſe they would not give uneaſineſs.

Mark the conduct of this great man, when beſet on every ſide with perplexities or embarraſſments; and not knowing what to do in order to preſerve the objects of his deareſt love; the pledges of his warmeſt affection, from hurt or violence. He needed not to be told, that the Almighty could preſerve from every danger, that he had the hearts of all men in his hand, and could turn them whitherſoever he pleaſed. Often had he experienced in paſt periods of his life, the goodneſs of his Heavenly Father, who had never ſtood afar off from his diſtreſs. Underneath him hitherto, had the arms of eternal ſtrength been, and around him, the wings of everlaſting refuge, in a ſingular manner had continually been diſplayed; which ſhould have encouraged him, ſtill to hope and truſt in God. Now was the trial of his patience—now he had an opportunity of diſcovering the ſtrength of his faith. When misfortunes preſs on every view,—when human prudence is at a ſtand, and wiſdom envelloped in darkneſs:—when there appears no eye to pity, and no arm to ſave, then religion ſtands confeſſed; and the Chriſtian is ſeen to the beſt advantage. Yet O Jacob, what fond huſband,—what affectionate father, doth not ſympathize with thy virtuous weakneſs! 'Tis true, by many years painful labour, thou haſt got property,

the apparent loſs whereof muſt give trouble; and that in proportion to the number of thoſe, who depend upon thee for ſupport. What however is this? compared to the following reflection, which might ariſe in his mind. Here am I,—yonder my wives:—my Rachel, and my precious babes—from whom perhaps I have already had the laſt tender kiſs, and whoſe mangled carcaſes may be the objects, which to-morrow's ſun may oblige me to behold.—Ye dear little innocents, what have you done?—with what can you be charged?—will not your ſweet ſmile,—your ſimplicity, ſecure from harm? Muſt you want bread, becauſe your father was to blame?—or bleed to ſatiate the reſentment he incurred?—Will the Parent of the Univerſe permit this?—ſurely no.—Here beams of ſpiritual conſolation might dart in, flowing from the free and rich promiſes of a covenant keeping God, which prove a ſolid foundation to reſt upon, in hours of temptation, and days of diſtreſs. It is expreſsly ſaid,—Faithful is he that hath promiſed. The conſideration of this important truth, ſupports the genuine chriſtian in all his perplexities. This renders his burden light, and makes him though fatigued, go on his way rejoicing, whereas the neglect thereof, occaſions many wearieſome days and nights to the trembling ſoul, and keeps it through fear of death, or hardſhips, while in the body, ſubject to bondage.

When-

Whenever, we find ourſelves materially oppoſed in our heavenly warfare, or weakened by adverſity, we ſhould fly to prayer, and plead the merciful, and kind interpoſitions of Providence, as they are promiſed in his word, and found in the experience of the truly virtuous, in all ages. No doubt, Jacob had recourſe to theſe on the preſent emergency, and leſt any be ſurprized, how he could be ſo much diſconcerted, conſidering how large and expreſs theſe to him, and to his poſterity had been; let the changes in the natural temper of man, and the viciſſitudes in the ſpiritual conteſt be remembered,—ſometimes ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might:—at other times crying out,—O that I knew where I might find him. However convinced we may be, that the divine promiſes are ſure and laſting, we cannot always be under equal impreſſions from them.

Nevertheleſs let us view, what Jacob might reaſonably plead in this reſpect—Might he not thus ſay,—O my ſoul, why art thou ſo caſt down by a report, and ſo diſquieted within me? Why am I ſo diſturbed with fear of evil, happening to my endearing family?—Why is real peace baniſhed from my boſom? Why brood over what hath not yet affected me? Did not the Sovereign Diſpoſer of all events ſay unto me, that memorable night, I went from my father's houſe;—Thy ſeed ſhall be as the duſt of the earth, and

thou ſhalt ſpread abroad to the weſt, and to the eaſt, and to the north, and to the ſouth, and in thee, and in thy ſeed, ſhall all the families of the earth be bleſſed. And behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places, whither thou goeſt, and will bring thee again unto this land, for I will not leave thee, until I have done that, which I have ſpoken to thee of. Theſe were the gracious words he ſpake to me his ſervant; and perhaps the venerable Patriarch ſubjoined, with theſe as arguments in my mouth, will I go to his throne of grace, aſking preſent deliverance. Prayer, is as it were a city of refuge to the good, againſt the malice of the mighty. And we are told, that as he was praying alone, during the ſolemn ſtillneſs of the night, or when he had ended his devotion, and ſtood liſtening to catch every ſound from the ſide, whereon his family lay, enjoying that ſlumber, which his care for them forbade him to take: A man encountered him, with whom he engaged in ſelf-defence. His firſt thoughts upon this occaſion probably were, that this was an artifice of his brother's to deſtroy him, and that this was the deſperate aſſaſſin ſent to ſurprize him. The darkneſs of the night, by keeping him from ſeeing his face, would ſtrengthen the conjectures. Or if he could perceive, though faintly, his countenance; in theſe periods Angels were wont to appear ſo like men, that by words, or actions only, were they fully diſtinguiſhed.

Some

Some fancy all this was done in viſion, whereas the nature of the whole narration evidently confutes this. The term no where occurs in ſcripture hiſtory ſave here, and being derived from that, which ſignifies duſt; denotes ſuch a ſtruggling with hands and feet, as ſtirreth up the duſt. That it was a bodily contention, appears from the effect on Jacob's thigh:—and that it was ſpiritual, is clear from the weapons uſed, viz. prayers and tears, and the anſwer to theſe conveyed in the bleſſing,—And by his ſtrength he had power with God and prevailed. Yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed; he wept and made ſupplication unto him, he found him in Bethel, and there he ſpake with us *.

It hath been aſked,—whether was this a created Angel, or the Eternal Son? Some apprehend this Angel was one of God's hoſt, mentioned in the 2d verſe, ſent from the Divine Majeſty: by whoſe order, and in whoſe more immediate preſence, he ſtrove with Jacob in the method deſcribed. They take him to have been one of thoſe called Angels of the Preſence by the Jewiſh writers, that wait continually on the Heavenly Throne, for the purpoſe of executing his high commiſſions. Others contend from the 28th verſe of this chapter, and the 3d of that of Hoſea, already quoted; that it was the Angel of the Covenant, even Chriſt ap-

* Hoſ. xii. 3, 4.

pearing

pearing in the form of a man, as he had done to Abraham before, and whom Jacob afterwards on his dying bed calls the Angel, who redeemed me from all evil *; which phraſe in its full extent, can only be applied to the Saviour.

There was a real combat between this Glorious Perſonage and Jacob: figuring the conflict which the children of God have to maintain againſt the devil, the world, and the fleſh, during this ſtate of weakneſs and error, which may be called the night of our exiſtence, compared with the dawn of everlaſting day. This induced the Apoſtle to enjoin the Epheſians to,—Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to ſtand againſt the wiles of the devil †. For we wreſtle not againſt fleſh and blood, but againſt principalities, againſt powers, againſt the rulers of the darkneſs of this world, againſt ſpiritual wickedneſs in high places. And he adviſes the Hebrews, to call to remembrance the former days, in which, After ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions ‡. In which thoſe the moſt precious in the ſight of God, are frequently Jacob like, hard put to it: yet not forſaken, becauſe they are enabled to lay hold on the Son for peace, pardon, and ſtrength. In the caſe before us, the conteſt laſted for ſome hours, until the riſing of the morning. And the obvious reaſon was, to exerciſe his graces,—to

* Gen. xlviii. 16. † Eph: vi. 11, 12. ‡ Heb. x. 32.

harden

harden him againſt future fears of Eſau,—to bleſs him more abundantly, that he might be a pattern in all ſucceeding ages, how to behave under the afflictive diſpenſations of Providence.

Verſe 25th. *And when he ſaw that he prevailed not againſt him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wreſtled with him.*

In this engagement, ſeveral particulars claim minute attention, but eſpecially theſe, viz. the amazing condeſcenſion of the Almighty in his dealings with his creatures; and the perſeverance, with which divine grace inſpires them. The firſt clauſe is ſpoken after the manner of men, whoſe knowledge, is the ſlow product of time and experience. In the Supreme Mind all things are at once perfectly known. When he ſaw that he prevailed not,—ariſing from no inability, for with a word he could have reduced the Patriarch to his original: and in compariſon of him, with whom he had now to do, Jacob was as a worm. Fear not thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Iſrael, I will help thee, ſaith the Lord, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Iſrael *. Thus the true Chriſtian perſuaded, that againſt all griefs on every ſide, Providence will ſooner or later ſend comfort, faints not, and however fatigued, looks to the hills whence cometh his aid, nor deſiſts from doing the beſt,

* Iſaiah, xli. 14.

and

and moſt he can. Jacob kept his ground. His every tender tie on the other ſide the brook, ruſhed upon his mind, and provided they were ſafe, he valued not the price, had it been life itſelf, at which he bought their ſecurity. As he knew not ſtill, but it was an emiſſary, perhaps the hardieſt of his brother's attendants, with whom he fought, the language of his feelings might be,—Meaneſt thou to deſtroy me?—Self-preſervation bids me urge every exertion in my own defence,—or is thy deſign to diſturb the peaceful ſlumbers of thoſe on the other ſide, and make to ſome of them, the preſent ſleep the laſt? Then ere thou canſt do this, I am reſolved to die. Divine Grace gives a luſtre to humanity, and tempers, without diminiſhing the ſtrength of its dictates. While he wreſtled in ſpirit, he felt as a father, and a huſband. His faith was well grounded, and his prayers were ardent. This was the gift of Heaven, as the ſacred word declares, and thouſands of millions beſides Jacob have experienced. Will he plead againſt me with his great power? No! For had he done ſo, the Patriarch like mouldering duſt would have ſunk before him, nay, fled at the preſence of his coming; but he would put ſtrength in me, and by that ſtrength he prevailed. The very elements of nature are not more obedient to the Creator's word, than thoſe miniſtring ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter to thoſe, who are heirs of ſalvation. Admitting, Jacob was peculiarly aſſiſted by Providence

dence in this conteſt, the Angel with whom he wreſtled, could have eaſily prevailed, had it not been contrary to the grand deſign. Not as has been already ſaid, through any imbecillity, but to encourage Jacob againſt approaching danger, did the heavenly combatant ſuffer himſelf to be conquered: alſo that the Patriarch might to ſucceeding ages, be a fit pattern for our imitation, and be a lively proof of what our Saviour remarks, even, that the kingdom of Heaven ſuffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

It was a private conflict, and ſuch for the moſt part are the ſharpeſt, which good men have. There were no witneſſes here, ſave God and the conſcience, for the Angel diſappeared, before the light could diſcover him to the ſervants of Jacob, or any other that might come that way. Nevertheleſs previous to his departure, let him know, by touching the hollow of his thigh, that he could with the ſame eaſe have overthrown him, as rendered him lame. This being ſo hard a place to come at, opened Jacob's eyes, who inſtantly concluded him more than man, who by a ſlight touch had effected this. The hollow place wherein the bone moveth being hurt, the bone itſelf was out of joint, or hung looſe—the Greek tranſlateth it—was benumbed. It was doubtleſs a ſenſible touch, yet ſome have thought, that Jacob felt not the effects of it, till the conteſt was over.

Great bleſſings received, require extraordinary humility. This was to humble the conqueror, by teaching him, that he could not overcome the troubles of the world, without ſorrow and pain, to both his mind and body. That he might not be too much puffed up with the glory and ſucceſs, of ſuch a ſingle combat, he is made ſenſible of human frailty. Thus Paul lifted up with revelations of love and favour to himſelf, to the third Heaven: leſt he ſhould be exalted above meaſure, felt a thorn in the fleſh, and the buffetings of Satan.

Verſe 26th. *And he ſaid, Let me go, for the day breaketh; and he ſaid, I will not let thee go, except thou bleſs me.*

Though the Angel ceaſed to wreſtle, yet Jacob kept his hold, determined whatever his fears at firſt had been, he now as a worſhipper of the true God, would loſe none of his ſpiritual advantages, and the Angel ſeems unable to break from him, without his conſent. O what pure comfort, and religious ſtrength may every pious breaſt draw from this! See the wondrous efficacy of prayer, not in the prevalence of human force to divine; but in the amazing condeſcenſion of divine grace, to the deſires of the upright in heart. Job could ſay, though he ſlay me, yet will I truſt in him: and Jacob exclaims, though thou haſt lamed me, yet will I hold thee. Stupendous effect of faith's importunity, that the Almighty intreats a creature to

let

let him go. Witneſs alſo in the caſe of Moſes, when pleading with him for rebellious Iſrael, a ſimilar circumſtance, Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot againſt them, and that I may conſume them, and I will make of thee a great nation *. Moſes deſiſts not, and we are informed in the ſame chapter, that the Lord repented him of the evil; which he thought to do unto the people.

The argument urged is,—For the morning looks forth. It is time this conflict ſhould end, and that thou ſhould mind thy other concerns. And he ſaid, I will not let thee go, except thou bleſs me. Jacob now underſtanding who he was; is reſolved to make the beſt uſe he can of the preſent gracious manifeſtation. 'Tis true, moſt paſſionately he loves his family, nor was he ever remiſs in attending to their concerns, and providing for their ſubſiſtence. Theſe were duties with which he was well acquainted, ſtill he judged them to be but ſecondary ones, compared with thoſe of a divine nature. He needed not be told, that the ſureſt way to be ſucceſsful in the diſcharge of all relative duties, was to be fervent and zealous, in performing thoſe due to the Great Author of our Being. Temporal concerns at this moment are out of his mind, wholly bent in the acquiſition of a greater point; wherefore he declares he cannot,

* Exod. xxxii. 10.

he

he will not let him go, without a reviving bleſſing, without a promiſe of grace to help in every future time of need. Having now the King's ear his petition muſt be granted. In like manner every ſincere Chriſtian wreſtles with the Angel of the Covenant, lays hold on his righteouſneſs in order to make peace with him, nor without a confirmation of his aid, will ſuffer him to depart. I held him ſaith the ſpouſe in the Canticles, and would not let him go, till I conſtrained him to pay a viſit to my ſoul. An Apoſtle adds, that the victory whereby we overcome the world, is that of our faith. Note alſo from this verſe, that the morning of God's ſpecial love and regard, endeth the wreſtlings of the darkeſt, and moſt lonely night. Their very weakneſs during the night, may be no mean indications of their future ſtrength. This idea made Paul ſay, Therefore I take pleaſure in infirmities, in reproaches, in neceſſities, in perſecutions, in diſtreſſes for Chriſt's ſake: for when I am weak, then am I ſtrong *. Nay in all theſe things, we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.

Verſe 27th. *And he ſaid unto him, What is thy name—And he ſaid Jacob.*

Hence we learn that though the Angel had already given ſome tokens of his Divinity, yet he had not poſitively owned his quality; but rather

* 2 Cor. xii. 10.

ſpeaks

ſpeaks, as if he ſtill was perfectly unacquainted with Jacob. This proceeded not from any deficiency of knowledge in the heavenly Meſſenger, no more than when he aſked of Cain, what was become of his brother Abel? but to produce a natural occaſion of ſaying, what infinite wiſdom meant, reſpecting the change of the name.

Verſe 28th. *And he ſaid, thy name ſhall be called no more Jacob, but Iſrael; for as a prince haſt thou power with God, and with men, and haſt prevailed.*

The daring mind that hath done eminent ſervices in the field of battle, frequently obtains a name or title, as a badge of his victory, and reward of his martial proweſs, immediately upon the performance. What are all theſe that have ever taken place? compared with thoſe ſpiritual bleſſings, and eternal honours, which the Angel confers on the Patriarch's head, by changing his name, which for his aſſurance, is again confirmed —And God ſaid unto him, thy name is Jacob: thy name ſhall not be called any more Jacob, but Iſrael ſhall be thy name: denoting, that he had power with God, and ſhould prevail with men *. He had both his names given him, from his ſtriving, but the firſt Jacob was at his birth, where he ſtrove to be the firſt born, but the efforts of nature were ineffectual; and ſuch will they always be, abſtractly conſidered, with reference to final

* Gen. xxxv. 10.

happineſs, whereas the other name, was on his victory through grace, which ultimately muſt prevail. Thou ſhalt not only be called Jacob, which ſignifies a ſupplanter, one who deals in craft, and gains his point by artful devices; but alſo Iſrael, which implies the being a Prince with God, a man of tried valour, and approved integrity. As if he had ſaid;—Thou haſt diſplayed ſuch ardour, and given proofs of ſo heroic a ſpirit in this combat, that thy brother, though he comes with four hundred men, needs create no perturbation in thy boſom. This victory is a ſufficient proof, that thou wilt receive no injury from him. Thou prevailed with Laban, whom once thou equally dreaded, ſo ſhalt thou with him, who is the object of thy preſent fear.

We grant, he was often afterwards called Jacob; even by the ſame Supreme Being, who gave him his new name, which nevertheleſs was his moſt frequent appellation, his poſterity, being generally denominated the children of Iſrael. Some writers imagine, that the word Jacob is henceforth uſed chiefly, to denote the church, or people of God, in a low and weak condition; in ſupport of which idea they quote Pſalm xliv. Thou art my King, O God, command deliverances for Jacob. And Jer. xxx. 7. Alas! for that day is great, ſo that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he ſhall be ſaved out of it. But notwith-

withſtanding theſe, or a few more ſimilar paſſages, we think it is rather allegorizing too far, ſeeing many other texts, of a like import, might be adduced, where the name Iſrael is uſed.

Verſe 29th. *And Jacob aſked him, and ſaid, tell me, I pray thee thy name: and he ſaid, wherefore is it that thou doſt aſk after my name? And he bleſſed him there.*

Though few have imagined, any difficulty lies in the explication of this verſe, yet we humbly conceive there is one. For if we ſuppoſe, that Jacob having told him his own name, wanted to be requited in kind, in order to know whether he was an angel, or a man; and that theſe words imply, that he did not apprehend it was God himſelf; then it is both partly true, and yet partly overturns the foregoing doctrine, namely, the foundation whereon, he could reaſonably be ſuppoſed, to aſk a bleſſing from him. God had appeared to Jacob; at leaſt twice before this; yet the Patriarch till now, never put this queſtion, the reaſon of which perhaps was, that from the ſingular circumſtances of the preſent tranſaction, Jacob might ſuppoſe, he would give himſelf ſome peculiar name, whereby he might the better, both remember and honour him. Such a motive ſwayed the venerable Manoah;—And Manoah ſaid unto the Angel of the Lord, What is thy name, that when

thy ſayings come to paſs, we may do thee ho-hour *?

The form of the requeſt was humble, but too curious, as appears from the anſwer, calculated to take his mind off, from ſuch vain inquiries. There are numberleſs things, which the Chriſtian wiſhes to know in the preſent ſtate, that Infinite Wiſdom, for the beſt purpoſes, delays to a future. Wherefore doſt thou aſk after my name? the Greek addeth,—which is marvellous. The Angel will ſuccour his neceſſity, and ſtrengthen him againſt adverſity, while he curbs his curioſity. After all, it argues no more weakneſs in the Patriarch to have put the queſtion, than it proves folly in thoſe expoſitors and writers, who pretend to ſtate the genuine cauſes, why the Angel concealed it. That ſome Angels have names is evident;—And the Angel anſwering, ſaid unto him, I am Gabriel that ſtand in the preſence of God; and am ſent to ſpeak unto thee, and to ſhew thee, theſe glad tidings †. Nor did the Angel of the Covenant Chriſt Jeſus, previous to his incarnation, diſdain to wear a name, inferior to that, at which every knee muſt bow. But I will ſhew thee, that which is noted in the Scripture of truth, and there is none that holdeth with me, in theſe things, ſave Michael your Prince ‡. Still more explicit is the 14th verſe of the 12th chapter. And at that time

* Judg. xiii. 17. † Luke, i. 19. ‡ Dan. x. 21.

ſhall

ſhall Michael ſtand up, the great Prince, which ſtandeth for the children of thy people: and there ſhall be a time of trouble, ſuch as never was ſince there was a nation, even to that ſame time: and that time thy people ſhall be delivered, every one that ſhall be found written in the book. Of whom can the Prophet be reaſonably ſuppoſed ſpeaking, ſave the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is alſo the glorious perſonage alluded to—And there was war in Heaven, Michael and his Angels fought againſt the dragon; and the dragon fought, and his Angels *. May we not as ſafely infer, that all the Angels have particular names as the ſtars. He telleth the number of the ſtars, he calleth them all by their names †. Many are of opinion, they changed their names, according to the offices and functions aſſigned them. Be this as it may, might not the true reaſon in the caſe before us, why the Angel concealed his name, be, that which is mentioned—And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Iſaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them ‡.

By the refuſal Jacob was taught humility, whence we learn, to ſet modeſt bounds to inquiries concerning ſecret things, belonging to the Lord our God, leſt like the men of Bethſhemeth, who looked into the ark, by preſuming too far, we

* Rev. xii. 7. † Pſal. cxlvii. 4. ‡ Exod. vi. 3.

may be ſmote with ſpiritual blindneſs, or ſome other heavy mark of the Divine diſpleaſure. Properly adapted to direct us is the Apoſtolic injunction;—For I ſay, through the grace given unto me, to every man, that is among you, not to think of himſelf more highly than he ought to think, but to think ſoberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the meaſure of faith *.

We are farther told,—He bleſſed him there. Here is the ſweet cloſe of all this wreſtling. The Patriarch's firſt requeſt is completely granted:—this was enough for him to know, and a ſufficient ſtay, under every future preſſure. All the bleſſings formerly given reſpecting him, and his poſterity, whether ſpiritual or temporal, were renewed and confirmed. This was in fact anſwering Jacob's queſtion, at once telling him both his name, and his nature. Who can bleſs ſave God? and who can ſmite equal to him?—Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath ſmitten, and he will bind us up †. Often after the ſevereſt trials, comes the moſt enrapturing comfort.

Verſe 30. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have ſeen God face to face, and my life is preſerved.*

The very giving of the name is an act of worſhip, expreſſing his thankfulneſs unto God. He

* Rom, xii. 3. † Hoſ. vi. 1.

calleth

calleth it not by his new name, but Peniel, that is, the face of God, thereby transferring all to Divine Grace. The Septuagint tranſlate it, the ſhape of God, though on what grounds, is not eaſy to determine. It is, as if the Patriarch had ſaid, I who by nature am ſo unworthy and weak, who laſt night was ſo diſcouraged, tried, and hard put to it, have been honoured with the ſight of Elohim, and bleſſed with the fulleſt aſſurances of his favour and protection. Not that he had ſeen the Divine Being in his eſſence, for in this reſpect no man hath ever at any time ſeen God, who dwelleth in light and majeſty, inacceſſible and full of glory; but, becauſe the Sovereign of the Univerſe, had been pleaſed to ſpeak to him, more familiarly and graciouſly, than with other good men in that period: and as one man, ſhould ſpeak with another, mouth to mouth. The enlivening conſequence is, that my life, and the lives of my family, which ſeemed to be in ſo much danger are preſerved. This hath been interpreted, according to that ancient doctrine, that if they ſaw any of the heavenly meſſengers, they would forthwith die. So thought the ancient Sage:—And Manoah ſaid unto his wife, we ſhall ſurely die, becauſe we have ſeen God *. Under the law indeed it was declared, Thou canſt not ſee my face: for there ſhall no man ſee me and live †. Which prompted Gideon,

* Judg. xiii. 22. † Exod. xxxiii. 19.

after he perceived he was an Angel of the Lord to ſay, Alas, O Lord God, for becauſe I have ſeen an Angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord ſaid unto him, peace be unto thee: fear not; thou ſhalt not die *. After all, there is no inſtance on record, of any one dying on ſuch a ſight. That particular diſcoveries of the Almighty, have been hazardous to the lives of his ſaints, is ſo far confirmed from the caſe of Daniel, who tells us, Daniel fainted, and was ſick certain days, afterward I roſe up, and did the King's buſineſs; and I was aſtoniſhed at the viſion, but none underſtood it †.

Verſe 31ſt. *And as he paſſed over Peniel, the ſun roſe upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.*

Having now obtained the bleſſing, he goes on his way rejoicing, and without perturbation, thinks on his temporal concerns. Anxious was this beſt of fathers, and gentleſt of huſbands, to join his family, to mingle in the tender embrace; and while he expatiated on the amazing goodneſs of God, and the ſuperlative richneſs of his mercy, to learn the young lips of his children to articulate the heart-felt prayer, and liſp the ſong of gratitude to the Great Deliverer. Now he tells his family at large, what had they known, they would not have paſſed the brook without him: viz. the coming of his brother with four hundred men. Conceive them preſſing cloſe to hear the narration, while

* Judg. vi. 22, 23. † Dan. viii. 37.

terror

terror and joy, alternately appear in every face. Imagine the rapture, with which he deſcribes the glorious iſſue of the night's amazing tranſactions.

As he paſſed over Penuel, that is the ford Jabbok, where in ſucceeding times a town was built, about forty miles from Jeruſalem, the ſun roſe upon him, as a ſpecial ſignal of farther comfort. Sorrow may endure for a night, ſays holy David, but joy cometh in the morning. The ſun in the firmament was, in this caſe, typical of the Sun that enlightens the New Jeruſalem, and irradiates every inhabitant, of that city of the Great King: according to the endearing promiſe, But unto you that fear my name, ſhall the Sun of Righteouſneſs ariſe, with healing in his wings: whereas the Sun of the wicked goeth down while it is yet day *.—And it ſhall come to paſs in that day, ſaith the Lord God, that I will cauſe the ſun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day †. We admit the ſun roſe upon the world in general, yet conveyed peculiar chearfulneſs to Jacob. Common mercies under peculiar circumſtances, may prove ſingular benefits to the righteous.

He halted on his thigh, becauſe the hip bone was out of its place. Holy conquerors may go out halters from their deepeſt trials: which is no evil, provided it engenders humility, and calls into

* Mal. iv. 2. † Amos, viii. 9.

exerciſe

exerciſe every other virtue. Many think this laſted only for a time: ſome imagine, that the Angel cured him before he came to Eſau, and others as warmly contend, that this infirmity continued till his dying day; which like St. Paul's thorn in the fleſh, kept him from being too much elated with the fullneſs of the promiſe; or the triumph of the victory. Theſe opinions have no other foundation than conjecture.

The Aronical prieſthood admitted of none to miniſter at the altar, who had any bodily blemiſh. Striking infirmities to thoſe who have them not, are matter of thankfulneſs to the Almigthy, who maketh the difference:—in the moral character, they for the moſt part ariſe from inattention, and receive their prevalence from habit. In the preſent ſtate of our exiſtence, the very beſt men are not exempted, even in their holieſt ſervices, much more in the hours of temptation, from ſome degree thereof. For were we to ſay we had no ſin, our own hearts would condemn us: the very aſſertion would prove our guilt, and the mirror of his law, who is to be our final judge, would ſhew our righteouſneſs, to be but as filthy rags before him. The nobleſt reſource, the good man hath under the ſenſe of theſe, is, when the divine promiſe is realized to him, as to the Apoſtle. And he ſaid unto me, my grace is ſufficient for thee, for my ſtrength is made perfect in weakneſs. Moſt gladly

gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Chriſt may reſt upon me *.

Verſe 32d. *Therefore the children of Iſrael eat not of the ſinew which ſhrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day, becauſe he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, in the ſinew that ſhrank.*

This cuſtom religiouſly obſerved by his poſterity, not only preſerved the remembrance of the ſtory, but alſo did honour to the Patriarch's memory. Not founded on ſuperſtition, it made their children talk of this conflict, the happy fruits whereof, they, with generations then unborn, in a peculiar manner enjoyed. The circumſtance ſeems to point out, that as the halting upon this thigh alluded to our infirmities, ſo the abſtinence from the eating of that ſinew, figured our mortification of bodily appetites, and abſtaining from evil in general. The Hebrew Doctors ſay, that after the Angel's touch, it became like the fat of a dead man, therefore it is unlawful for the ſons of Iſrael to eat of the ſinew, in common meats, and in holy; in tame cattle, and wild beaſts, in the right thigh, and in the left. Fowls having no ſuch place, were of courſe excepted. The Jews of this day are careful to cut away, out of all beaſts, which they kill and eat, this ſinew, with all the branches

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

of

of it underneath, and the muſcle wherein they are, for the greater aſſurance that they are right. Alſo in their ſacrifices, when the members of the burnt-offering were cut in pieces, and ſalted; then we are told by Maimonides, all the pieces were laid upon the altar, and they took out the ſinew that ſhrank, being upon the top of the altar, and threw it upon the aſhes, which were in the midſt of the altar. Among the Hebrews, that pain which we term ſciatic, was named, Gidhan naſſĕh, viz. the ſinew that ſhrank.

It muſt however be confeſſed, that there is a deal of vanity, and ſuperſtition mingled with this obſervance. A love of antiquity, carried beyond the limits of knowledge and poſitive proof, may give a ſanction to any thing: witneſs a woman of Samaria, who doubtleſs in common with her neighbours, had a ſilly attachment to a well, when ſhe could ſay to our Saviour;—Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himſelf, and his children, and his cattle *?

Whether the obſervance was of Divine appointment hath much puzzled interpreters? Some contend it was a poſitive command: others conceive it to have been a voluntary obſervation; which in proceſs of time became ſuperſtitious; and the laſt ſuppoſition carries the greater plauſibility, from

* John iv. 12.

there

there being no mention of this, among thoſe rules concerning abſtinence, which we find in the books of Moſes.

We are alſo aware of the ſneers thrown out by Deiſtical Writers, as if ſuch a conflict degraded Omnipotence, without conſidering, that his thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. For he chuſes, what in our eſtimation, are the fooliſh things of the world, to confound the wiſe; and the weak things to confound thoſe, that are mighty. Had ſuch been to inſtitute a Sacrament for the Jews, probably, they would not have dreamed of circumciſion. But the Apoſtle hath told us, That God chuſeth alſo—baſe things of the world, and things which are deſpiſed, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought, things that are *. After all, what is this condeſcenſion in wreſtling with Jacob, compared with being born in a ſtable, ſtooping to waſh his own ſervants feet, to his making himſelf of no reputation, and humbling himſelf to obedience, who was Lord of the Univerſe, even unto the ſhameful, and ignominious death of the Croſs?

From this beautiful, and intereſting paſſage, many inferences tending to confirm us in the practice of piety might be adduced; and a very ſtriking analogy, drawn between the Patriarch, and our Saviour. On this latter point much hath been

* 1 Cor. i. 28.

wrote

wrote, and more ſaid, becauſe in ſuch caſes, great room is allowed to a fertile imagination. That he was an eminent type of Chriſt, is evident, from our Redeemer being called of his Father by the very name. Thou art my ſervant, O Iſrael, in whom I will be glorified *. View him travelling to and fro, in an afflicted condition, almoſt all his days, being the moſt diſtreſſed of all the ſaints, Job excepted, whoſe hiſtory is on record: an emblem of him, who, though Lord of all worlds, went about doing good, without having for himſelf, a place of his own to lay his head. Jacob leaves his father's houſe, goes to Haran, and lives there as a ſervant for his two wives Rachel and Leah. Chriſt left the boſom of his Father, and ſojourned in the form of a ſervant, to purchaſe a ſpouſe, viz. a Church, conſiſting of Jews and Gentiles. From Jacob, ſprang the twelve Patriarchs, who were the fathers of that holy nation, according to the fleſh. And the twelve Apoſtles of the Lamb, are the fathers of the holy nation, according to the ſpirit. Very early, Jacob began to ſtruggle with his rough brother Eſau, who carried his enmity to ſuch a pitch, as to reſolve to murder him for no other fault, than excluding him from the privilege of birth-right, which he had juſtly forfeited, by ſelling it for a morſel of meat, and therefore, when he would afterwards have inhe-

* Iſa. xlix. 3.

rited

rited the bleſſing, he could not by all his tears, induce his father to beſtow it upon him. And early indeed the Saviour, felt, the effects of the world's undeſerved malice. His rough brethren the Jews, were ſo highly incenſed againſt him, as to imbrue their hands in his blood. And why this O ye malicious Jews! but becauſe you gloried in your birth-right, not being able to endure, that the Kingdom of God ſhould according to his doctrine, be taken from you, and transferred to the deſpiſed Gentiles, though you had juſtly forfeited all title to ſuch a glorious prerogative, by your great contempt of ſpiritual, and heavenly bleſſings.

Jacob alſo went down into Egypt, by the direction of the Almighty, and there Joſeph fed him. So Chriſt was carried down into Egypt by Joſeph, the ſon of another Jacob, who there provided for him, that the ſaying of the Prophet might be fulfilled. Out of Egypt have I called my ſon. The Patriarch was alſo a type of the Church, and indeed of every Chriſtian, whether we view him as choſen in the womb; ſtriving at his birth, buying the birth-right,—meeting the Angels of God,—wreſtling with the Angel of the Covenant,—or buried in Canaan, after a troubleſome life. When his fears were the greateſt, and the varied concerns of his dear little family, lay the deepeſt on his heart; he betakes himſelf to prayer, and by that wondrous key, enters the chambers of the Great King. In like manner Chriſt often when under

the moſt ungrateful returns from men, particularly the night previous to his awful ſufferings, retired in prayer to hold converſe with his Heavenly Father. Hear the Apoſtle, Who in the days of his fleſh, when he had offered up prayers and ſupplications, with ſtrong crying and tears, unto him that was able to ſave him from death, and was heard in that he feared *. Think on the ſpiritual conflict he ſuſtained, when he prayed: Father if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from me, nevertheleſs, not my will, but thine be done. Wherefore he is able alſo to ſave to the uttermoſt them, that come unto God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them. Hence the good man learns, that under his heavieſt preſſures, he may by prayer have recourſe to divine aid, and with Jacob's zeal, if he wreſtles, ſhall like him, ſooner or later, through grace be victorious. He neither deſpairs, nor truſts altogether to human aid, both which are diſpleaſing to God; as by the firſt we diſtruſt his power and goodneſs; the two principal attributes of his nature; and we by the other, put him out of the queſtion wholly, and thereby deny his Providence. Was it in the garments of Eſau, that Jacob obtained his father's bleſſings? even ſo, in the robes of our Saviour's righteouſneſs, though our beſt ſervices are rough like the hands of Eſau, our gracious God will

* Heb. v. 7.

grant

grant every thing requiſite for our preſent peace, and future felicity. Did Jacob die bleſſing the twelve Patriarchs? ſo, after Jeſus had bleſſed the twelve Apoſtles, he was received up into Heaven. Was Jacob at laſt buried in Canaan's land?—So ſhall the importunate ſeeker of Jacob's God, be found of him, provided they continue in the road of duty, and are inſtant in prayer. For however much, or often, he tries their faith and patience, he will not allow them to be overcome, but will proportion their ſtrength to the conflict, and at laſt diſmiſs them, with the laurel of his Divine approbation, as he did the contending Patriarch. As mindful of him, and to impreſs our minds with the important truth, he uſes his name, when he plights his promiſe for this. He never ſaid unto the ſeed of Jacob, ſeek ye my face in vain, for whoſo ſeeketh ſhall find; and to him that knocketh, it ſhall be opened. And after a ſhort courſe of weariſome days and nights, which may be in the greateſt number, to ſome of his deareſt people; they ſhall take up their eternal reſt on the heavenly Canaan's ſhore, where they ſhall no more ſuffer from imperfection, ſin, or ſorrow; but ſolace themſelves in the pure joys of immortality, to which the Lamb ſhall lead them, and be the glory in the midſt of them. Yes, ye ſerious ſuppliants at a throne of grace, though like Jacob's, your days may comparatively be few and full of

evil, yet ye are the favourites of Heaven, and ſhall ultimately be a people ſaved by the Lord. Amen, and Amen.

EXPO-

EXPOSITION III.

From GEN. XLV. and firſt Fifteen Verſes.

Then Joſeph could not refrain himſelf before all them that ſtood by him; and he cried, Cauſe every man to go out from me: and there ſtood no man with him, while Joſeph made himſelf known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians, and the houſe of Pharaoh heard. And Joſeph ſaid unto his brethren, I *am* Joſeph: Doth my father yet live? and his brethren could not anſwer him: for they were troubled at his preſence. And Joſeph ſaid unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you; and they came near: and he ſaid, I *am* Joſeph your brother, whom ye ſold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourſelves, that ye ſold me hither: for God did ſend me before you to preſerve life. For theſe two years *hath* the famine *been* in the land: and yet *there are* five years, in the which *there ſhall* neither *be* earing nor harveſt. And God ſent me before you, to preſerve you a poſterity in the earth, and to ſave your lives by a great deliverance. So now *it was* not you *that* ſent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his houſe, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haſte you, and go up to my father, and ſay unto him, Thus ſaith thy ſon Joſeph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, tarry not. And thou ſhalt dwell in the land of Goſhen, and thou ſhalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou haſt. And there will I nouriſh

thee, (for yet *there are* five years of famine;) leſt thou, and thy houſhold, and all that thou haſt, come to poverty. And behold, your eyes ſee, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that *it is* my mouth that ſpeaketh unto you. And you ſhall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have ſeen; and ye ſhall haſte, and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kiſſed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

THE ſtudy of human nature, hath invariably moſt amply rewarded, both in pleaſure and profit, thoſe, who have been the greateſt proficients in it. Our labours to attain this kind of knowledge, beſides, requiring certain aids from nature and experience, are frequently attended, with many painful ſeverities, which perſeverance never fails in the end to remove; and in real ſatisfaction, repays each mortifying circumſtance, a hundred fold. It had coſt our elegant Poet many hours of aſſiduous application, ere he could on the ſound principles of philoſophy, declare the reſult of his reſearches, in that expreſſive line,

"The proper ſtudy of mankind is man,"

which after all, is but an ingenious paraphraſe of that ancient motto, Know thyſelf, which juſtly gained the Sage, the appellation of Wiſe, and this, aſſiſted by ſtill nobler religious motives, induced another of our ſublime Bards to exclaim—Man know thyſelf,—all wiſdom centres there. Philoſophically

phically ſpeaking, there are only two ways of acquiring this ſcience, viz. theory and practice; by theſe meaning reading, and the exerciſe of our faculties, joined to converſation, or mingling in the active ſcenes of life. 'Tis not enough to know, what mankind have been, or ſhould be, unleſs we alſo know them as they are, under the veils of hypocriſy, intereſt, pleaſure, or ambition. Neither would it ſuffice, that we had frequently ſeen, or even detected theſe, amidſt the variety of mazes they purſue, if we were not able to trace them to their ſource, and arrange them under the ſeparate paſſions of the human breaſt: alſo to diſcriminate the particularities, which they have one from another. We allow ſome men are far better qualified for making a figure in the one line, than in the other; nay, Nature ever attentive in the diſtribution of her gifts, and guided, reſpecting thoſe of the underſtanding, by a ſparing hand, grants but to few individuals, equal powers for both.

Without entering more deeply into this point, or attempting what in our humble opinion is exceeding fooliſh; to ſtate, which is the moſt eligible for a man to poſſeſs, or which the more uſeful to ſociety? we will only obſerve, that in chuſing our helps for either ſpeculation or practice, our ſureſt reſource ought to be to the Scriptures: ſince there is no book, where human nature, is decyphered, and delineated with that accuracy and clearneſs, which reigns ſo univerſally throughout the word of God.

Herein we have deſcribed in the trueſt, and moſt affecting manner, every paſſion in all its ſtages and effects, that actuates the human frame. Every moral character, whether good or bad in thoſe pages, appear in an undiſſembled light. Each wears its native garb, nor can the bad ſeduce, ſave the unwary and unthinking: while the good, muſt charm and engage, every lover of truth and moral diſcipline.

Aware of there being many glorious inſtances of parental, filial, conjugal, and fraternal affection in the pages of antiquity; which inſtead of detracting in the leaſt from, we rather wiſh they were better known to the generality of men, and more eſpecially impreſſed on the minds of youth. Yet we contend, that the caſe of Joſeph and his brethren, for every pure and amiable virtue, for every tender emotion of the breaſt, is not equalled by any other ſtory on record. In order to excite a veneration for theſe qualifications, infinitely ſurpaſſing the diſtinctions of wealth and grandeur; and to ſtrengthen their influence in our own hearts, let us, previous to a more minute inquiry into them, trace the life of this remarkable perſonage to the preſent period, that is, to the beginning of this chapter.

The poſterity of Abraham, according to the Divine promiſe, grew ſo numerous, that to prevent confuſion, it was neceſſary to divide them into tribes, which indeed were rather nations, to

ſuch

ſuch multitudes did they increaſe. Their number was twelve, and took their denomination from Jacob's ſons. All theſe were born to him in Padan-aram, except Benjamin, the ſon of Rachel his beloved wife, and the younger, as well as only brother of Joſeph. There is no accounting for the partiality of parental affection, it hath been conſpicuous in the hiſtory of Man, nor are the wiſeſt characters always exempted from this weakneſs. That the beſt in the family is ſeldom the favourite, though true upon the whole, as far as we know, holds not here. Joſeph in conſequence of being his father's darling, was looked on by his brethren with an evil eye, which under ſuch circumſtances, is a natural concomitant. Unluckily for this mild endearing youth, in one reſpect, he told two dreams, which ſeemed to prognoſticate his own future exaltation, and referred to a time, when his brethren would bow before him, as vaſtly their ſuperior. This was oil to the flame, irritated their tempers, which from the behaviour of Simeon and Levi, if we may form a general ſuppoſition, were none of the leaſt ungovernable: and raiſed their envy to ſuch a pitch, that in oppoſition to the dictates of filial obedience, and the warm ties of a brother's blood, they plan his ruin; when coming to them, on a kind inquiry after their health from their father. Fraud, much more revenge, is often well diſſembled. Jacob by ſending him, probably meant to ingratiate him, by

thoſe little pleaſing offices, with his brethren; whoſe prejudices were known to him, though had he dreamed, they had ſubſided into fixt principles of averſion, he never would have ſent his darling boy amongſt them. Ah!—little did his heart, beating with ardour to embrace them, and eager to communicate the little minutiæ of the family, conceive the reception he was to meet. Youth is for the moſt part unſuſpecting, and its attachments are warm.

The tender-hearted Reuben felt the brother within his manly ſoul, and meant to deliver him; though herein he was diſappointed. What muſt the implacability of theſe brothers have been, when Reuben to varniſh this deſign, found himſelf obliged to adviſe, the throwing him into a pit. A ſoul without the milk of human kindneſs, is but a monſter in the ſhape of man. Having contrived an excuſe to give their aged father, they moſt unnaturally intended, to ſtarve him to death in a ſlime pit, while they ſat down to eat bread. Cruel Brothers, ſure your unhallowed lips durſt aſk no bleſſing on that meal! But Heaven takes up thoſe whom man forſakes, and directs Judah to propoſe a ſcheme, more favourable to Joſeph, namely, to ſell him to a company of Iſmaelites, who were carrying the produce of Arabia to Egypt. Is it not remarkable? that the propoſer of this inhuman ſale, was he, who did the greateſt obeiſance, and ſtood in the deepeſt agitation of ſpirits before this

this injured brother. What muſt the heart of Joſeph have felt by the way, while now eſtranged from his father's houſe, he muſt from a delicately reared ſon, ſubmit to the rigours of ſervitude: without a friend, or the means of conveying intelligence, perhaps of his ſituation to that father, who would have redeemed him. Unmoved with the nobler feelings of humanity, like the other dealers in the ſale or purchaſe of their fellow-creatures, theſe wandering and ignorant Arabs, had not curioſity to aſk the ſtory of his woe, or if they did, diſregarded it, and ſold him to Potiphar, whoſe more enlightened ſoul, and ſuperior penetration, on beholding the confined virtues of this accompliſhed young man, alleviated his calamities, by making him the chief director of all his concerns, and in ſome meaſure compenſated them, by placing the moſt unbounded confidence in him.

That the goodneſs of Providence might from its being rather unexpected, bind him the more forcibly to the diſcharge of every duty; or for the vindication of the Divine perfections, that the finger of God might be the more viſibly diſcerned in his riſe, he for a while endured affliction, being caſt into priſon, owing to the falſe accuſations of an offended guilty female. She who can be falſe to her huſband, will not much heſitate at the breach of any other part of juſtice, nor if her criminal paſſion is baffled, can ever be perfectly reconciled to the object. The wife of Potiphar would

would never have effected his releaſe. The God to whoſe laws he had given in his circumſtances, ſo ſtriking a proof of his fidelity, deſerted him not; but remembered him in the dungeon, and made other external events, conſpire, to work the delivery of ſo much ſuffering virtue. Two of Pharaoh's principal ſervants, having incurred his royal diſpleaſure, had been impriſoned. They happened each of them to have ſingular dreams in one night. Joſeph by means of the Heavenly Wiſdom, wherewith he was filled, gave the interpretation. The events correſponded to his prediction. However ready men are to make promiſes in adverſity, yet upon a change to the better, they are very apt to forget theſe. Of this, thouſands in all ages, beſides the Egyptian Butler, have been inſtances. Joſeph continues in priſon, till the time, the ſet time to favour him is arrived, and then the means will preſent themſelves: for the purpoſe of God ſhall ſtand, and he will do all his pleaſure. Pharaoh has a dream, which none can explain, which brings the Butler to a recollection of his fault. The Hebrew youth is mentioned, ſent for, interprets the dream, and is promoted to be ruler over all the land of Egypt. How marvellous are thy works, O Lord! Juſt and true are all thy ways, O thou King of Saints!—O wonderful deliverance! amazing change! The ſhepherd's ſervant's ſon, is now primate of the kingdom of Egypt, the cradle of antient learning, and nurſe

of

of the arts and ſciences. Under a Divine impulſe, the Monarch himſelf exclaims, Can we find ſuch a one as this is, a man in whom the ſpirit of God is? Thou ſhalt be over my houſe, and according to thy word ſhall all my people be ruled, only in the throne, will I be greater than thou. With alacrity he beſtows the enſigns of royalty, cauſing him to ride in the ſecond chariot, and ordered the heralds to proclaim, Abreth, a word of uncertain ſignification, being rendered by ſome Saviour of the World, by others, Tender Father, but we agree with that in the context, Bow the knee, which was done in token of honour and ſubjection to him, as Viceroy of the country.

During the ſeven years of plenty, he heaped up in immenſe ſtores, the abundant product of the earth. The ſeven years of dearth began now to occaſion anxiety in every family, and to paint poverty in every face. So univerſal was this famine, that thoſe almoſt of every contiguous country, went to Egypt to buy corn. Thither does Jacob ſend his ten ſons. They are known to Joſeph, who examined them ſtrictly, and tried them ſeverely. Pretending to take them for ſpies, he retained Simeon as a hoſtage, and by his interrogatories having learned the ſtate of their family, ordered them next time they came, to bring Benjamin with them: and this in a ſpecial manner, to gratify the warmeſt wiſhes of his breaſt. To compleat their confuſion in the mean time, their money was re-

ſtored

ſtored in their ſacks. Jacob knew not well what to make of this, while he was far more grieved, to think of the hard condition of their returning, namely, that Benjamin ſhould go likewiſe. Nothing but cruel neceſſity, at laſt forces him to comply. Entruſted in a ſpecial manner to Judah, he ſets out with his brethren for Egypt. The Viceroy determined to heighten their diſtreſs, ordered his own cup, out of which he daily drank, to be put in the mouth of Benjamin's ſack, and them all allowed to go quietly out of the town. Soon after, he diſpatches his truſty ſteward to overtake, charge them with theft, and on diſcovery bring them back. Like honeſt men, with indignation, they upbraid the accuſer, and from conſcious integrity, pronounce death as the penalty to him, with whom it ſhould be found, and what was ſtretching the laws of retribution too far, ſervitude to the reſt. The well apprized ſteward, took them at their word. Immediately the ſearch begins,—when O aſtoniſhing accident, the cup is found in Benjamin's ſack. Amazement glowed in every feature, the deepeſt anguiſh pierced every heart. Scarce knowing what they did, they quickly returned into the city, and inſtantly verified their brother's dreams; ſeeing they fell proſtrate before him, as objects almoſt afraid to beg his clemency. He who firſt propoſed the ſale of a younger brother, now for himſelf and the reſt, acknowledges the juſtice of ſervitude. Joſeph's declaring, that

they

they might all go, but that Benjamin muſt be his bond-man, went like a thunderbolt to their already broken, and diſpirited hearts.

Upon hearing this mournful ſentence, Judah mindful of his promiſe to his aged father, now ſtands forth, to diſplay his filial obedience and brotherly love. Although Joſeph had communed with them before, through an interpreter; yet, as in Egypt it was well known he was an Hebrew, Judah might alſo have learned this circumſtance, though the vaſt difference in their rank, prevented their aſking him of what particular family, and wiſhing to avail himſelf of a kindred ſtock, ſpoke in that language. With the greateſt humility, and in the moſt moving manner, he endeavours to touch the feelings of Joſeph, by a ſhort ſtate of facts from the time of their firſt appearance there, till the preſent diſtreſſing moment. He pleads for the young man's liberty, becauſe thereon depended the life of a venerable father, devoted to his children: whence ſome of his moſt pungent ſorrows had already ſprang, alluding to the loſs, which he here calls death of Joſeph. Strange, that he mentions not Benjamin's own children, who at this time was the father of ten children, who went down with Jacob into Egypt. In the hurry of his ideas, this probably eſcaped him. The language of ſtrong emotions is ſeldom connected, however bold and expreſſive. He is willing to become a ſlave for Benjamin, that Jacob may

again embrace his darling ſon: which brings us to the ſubject of our preſent expoſition.

Verſe 1ſt. *Then Joſeph could not refrain himſelf, before all them that ſtood by him, and he cried; Cauſe every man to go out from me, and there ſtood no man with him, while Joſeph made himſelf known unto his brethren.*

Whenever the zealous Judah ended, no doubt his brethren, ſignified their concurrence in what he had uttered, and their acquieſcence, with the doleful viciſſitude of ſervitude for freedom; provided, that their younger brother returned to his native home. Upon hearing this pathetic ſpeech, he could no longer act the majeſtic part of Vice-roy, or the ſeverer character of judge. The long loſt, though for years paſt, the happy, and much honoured Joſeph, could not refrain himſelf. Nor is this to be wondered at, if we conſider their melancholy condition, their preſent uncertainty, anxiety, danger, and heart-rending affliction. Now were their haughty ſpirits humbled, now envy to one another, and jealouſy were quite extinguiſhed. Their being about in effect to loſe another brother, brought to their mind the baſe and unworthy part they had taken, in the deſtruction as they imagined of one before. This remembrance of their guilt—the happy change of their diſpoſitions, and mutual affection for each other, clearly appeared in their preſent conduct. Seeing their concern for his favourite and only brother,

brother, might operate not a little on Joſeph. This would help to obliterate the memory of their unkindneſs to himſelf. Twice had Judah mentioned him in the courſe of his animated oration; which tended to relax his ſofter feelings, and but for decency, would have made their uſual ſymptoms flow. Add to all theſe motives of this extatic joy, their earneſtneſs for the eaſe and happineſs of that dear parent, who had trained his young mind to virtue and knowledge. We grant, it entirely depends on the diſpoſition of the perſon, whether the favourite proves the moſt dutiful. Admitting it ſeldom happens, yet Joſeph, is a pleaſing inſtance of filial obedience, in every part of his varied life, and the reflection of what he owed this beſt of parents, doubled the pleaſure which his ingenuous mind felt, on perceiving proper reſpect paid him by thoſe, who, as brethren were ſtill dear to him.

Another circumſtance, directing him no longer to delay the diſcovery, aroſe from the almoſt ſtarving condition of his father's family. If the ſcripture hath ſtamped him to be worſe than an infidel, who provides not to the beſt of his ability for thoſe of his own houſehold, what muſt be the heart of the wretch, that lets a parent pine? Wiſely hath the Creator of the Univerſe, given more than a lion's ſtrength, to natural affection. Therewith is connected, or in a great meaſure hangs every other valuable principle, and

the exerciſe of all virtue. It is the very bond of human ſociety, void of which it could not long ſubſiſt. It is ſo deeply rooted in our conſtitution, that the moſt wicked or profligate cannot altogether eradicate it; or wholly prevent themſelves, from being leſs or more influenced by it. For the miſcreant, who hath betrayed his country; hath braved death in the defence of his child. Natural affection is a principle of ſuch a kind, as ſhews him to be amongſt the very worſt of men, on whom it hath no force. If thus univerſal its ſway over the vicious, what muſt be its actings, in the boſom of the truly virtuous and humane? How beautifully doth it irradiate the character! How tenderly melt the heart of Joſeph! whoſe ſenſibility ſoon repreſented, the extreme hardſhips of enduring famine, with a ſmall and numerous offspring. Then to be poor is a misfortune indeed, ſince the worthy man in that caſe, ſuffers a thouſand deaths, in the wants of his children, which he cannot relieve. Granting there was corn in Egypt, yet, it was too far diſtant from the inſtantaneous nature of ſeveral of their neceſſities: conſequently, the humanity of Joſeph, could not bear their undergoing that weariſome fatigue any more: eſpecially, when he reflected, how eaſy it would be for him more abundantly, and in a leſs expenſive manner to ſupply them, were they nearer to himſelf? Why did Providence ſo miraculouſly raiſe him to ſuch a diſtinguiſhed pitch of

of greatneſs, but that the communications of his liberality, might be the more extenſively felt? And ſurely the firſt objects of this were, thoſe, to whom he ſtood in ſo cloſe, and endearing a relation.

Having ſufficiently tried his brethren, the ſpeech of Judah wound his paſſions up, that he could refrain no longer, or ſuffer thoſe who ſtood by him to remain. Reſpect to his own character, joined to a delicate concern for his brethren, induced him in a firmer tone than ordinary, to order every one to leave the apartment, where probably in ſtate he ſat. He knew that ſervants, and the lower claſſes of people, were in general bad judges of the pangs of ſenſibility, and that there were expreſſions hereof, which only thoſe poſſeſſed of equal degrees of it, or peculiarly intereſted, ought to witneſs. Every expreſſion of his love was to be ſincere, wherefore he choſe none to be preſent, who could miſconſtrue. His attendants and ſervants might think he demeaned himſelf, and be induced to relax in their punctuality, nor was the idle curioſity of thoſe, who in order to hear the trial, and learn the fate of the ſtranger, had crowded the hall or room, to be gratified. Not that he was aſhamed of his brethren, like many modern characters, of infinitely leſs conſequence, than Joſeph, who will hurry out of ſight of their general acquaintance, a poor relation, in whoſe veins the ſame blood flows:

but to prevent that confuſion, being obſerved, which any alluſion to their guilt on his part, or acknowledgment of it on theirs ſhould occaſion thereby, to be made notorious. He not only covered their fault from the Egyptians, but never, we apprehend, told it to his father, otherwiſe the holy Patriarch might have as pointedly, if not more ſo, marked it in his laſt benedictions, as he did the cruel act of Simeon and Levi, reſpecting the Shechemites, of which if a parent could ſay:—O my ſoul, come not thou into their ſecret, unto their aſſembly, mine honour be not thou united! Curſed be their anger for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel: what would he not have ſaid? about the unnatural ſale of that affectionate brother, and dutiful child, to whom under Providence, they owed their own preſervation, and that of their little ones.

We are informed, there ſtood no man with him, when Joſeph made himſelf known to his brethren. Real friendſhip is the child of liberty, on which account the converſations of friends ſhould be as free, as they ought to be ſacred. Ere Joſeph exerciſes the moſt pure and ardent affection, he lays aſide all pomp, and puts himſelf on a par with its object.

Verſe 2d. *And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians, and the houſe of Pharaoh heard.*

Before his ſervants could clear the apartment, tears began to drop upon his comely cheeks, and

were

were ready to burſt out with ſuch violence, that the moment the doors were ſhut, he could not prevent them, but gave forth his voice with weeping. The more his genuine affection had been confined; the more violent were its expreſſions on breaking out. Well might his brethren conjecture the diſcourſe was to be moving, ſince a ſhriek was the preface; nor leſs intereſting, when tears were the dedication. Apathy is only another term for ſtupidity, and if incompetent with common ſenſe, much more with a religious mind, in which character, tears frequently anticipate the tongue. Hereby he made known his brotherly regard in diveſting himſelf of the auſterity, wherewith he formerly uſed them. At the ſame time ſhewing an excellent pattern of a peaceable temper, eſtranged from revenge, though they had merited it, nor was the power of requital to him now awanting. They ſaw the moſt unequivocal marks of friendſhip, in the conduct of him, who a little before, appeared their injured ſuperior, and incenſed judge.

It is ſaid,—the Egyptians heard. It is likely, before they were ordered out, they noticed the alteration of the viſage,—the tear,—and ſomething in the whole of the Governor's deportment, towards theſe eleven men, which ſeemed vaſtly myſterious, and curioſity to know others concerns, no uncommon thing among ſervants, induced them only to retire to the next room, where they would ſoon

hear his loud cries, and part of his converſation. The actions of the great are quickly reported, and narrowly watched; becauſe, whether the rehearſal gives pleaſure or pain, it affords countenance either to virtue or vice, and attaches a ſort of conſequence to the narrator. Owing to the ſingularity of the preſent circumſtance, they who heard, would directly run to inform the Court, who from report, are ſaid alſo to have heard.

Verſe 3d. *And Joſeph ſaid unto his brethren, I am Joſeph. Doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not anſwer him, for they were troubled at his preſence.*

Did he ſtand a moment in a fixt gaze, like a perſon inſenſible, whom the torrent of unfeigned paſſion deprived of the power of ſpeech? which as ſoon as he obtained; in a tone of voice expreſſive of what he felt, in an abrupt manner, congenial to his labouring thought,—cries,—I am Joſeph: uſing their vernacular tongue. They knew him only by his Egyptian name, Zapnathpaaneah, one to whom hidden things are revealed, or a Revealer of ſecrets, for his Hebrew name would be gradually forgot in that country; ſeeing, after his promotion he would never be called by it. He had aſked them of their welfare, and ſaid—Is your father well, the old man of whom ye ſpake? Is he yet alive *? Whereas now to expreſs his joy in the heart gladdening tidings, he rapturouſly

* Gen. xliii. 27.

exclaims

exclaims,—Doth my father, who loved me tenderly for his Rachel's ſake; and who doubtleſs lamented me bitterly, nor has forgot me ſtill;—Doth, he I ſay yet live? This ardent queſtion, the ſenſe of guilt and fear of puniſhment incapacitated them to anſwer. They were terrified at his preſence. Such an unexpected diſcovery of a poor, young, innocent, and amiable brother, ſold by them with a purpoſe to croſs God's revelation concerning him, wrought the utmoſt amazement. The very name went like a dart to their hearts, and created ſuch perturbation there, that for a while they could not articulate a ſyllable.

Verſe 4th. *And Joſeph ſaid unto his brethren, Come near to me I pray you, and they came near, and he ſaid, I am Joſeph your brother, whom ye ſold into Egypt.*

Permit me here to differ from thoſe commentators, who ſuppoſe that he ſat in his chair of ſtate, while he ſpake the firſt declaration. Nature felt too much for that, nor is the idea conſiſtent with his earneſtneſs. We admit it to be very probable, that upon hearing that declaration, being thunderſtruck, they had ſtarted back; wherefore he thus addreſſes them, the height of his own paſſion being expreſſed, retiring a little himſelf, to encourage them to a cloſer conference, in order to ſpeak more fully his mind, and eaſe their hearts: Be not diſmayed,—draw near without reſerve,—ſpeak privately and freely,—look at me,—ſome of

my features you may recollect,—whence be aſſured, that I am your brother Joſeph. A relation which I claim: which all my greatneſs has not weakened, nor any length of time can ever make me forget. Whom you ſold into Egypt, that is to them who in fact ſold me there, which barbarity and unkindneſs on your ſide, hath not detached you from my heart, or ſeparated from my love. This alluſion to their crime, proceeded not from a wiſh to upbraid them, but to confirm their belief of the preſent diſcovery, and to lead them on, to what he ſtill meant to add for their future comfort.

Verſe 5th. *Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry, with yourſelves, that ye ſold me hither: for God did ſend me before you to preſerve life.*

Friendſhip in conjunction with grace, mentions faults, not to reproach, but to melt the ſinner, and allure to amendment. In proportion to the lenity and mildneſs wherewith this is done; the deepneſs of the contrition generally is. The ſoftneſs of Joſeph, heightened the internal diſtreſs of his brethren. Him they beheld with tranſport and reverence; but could not meet one another's eyes, without reproach and ſelf-condemnation. Each might ſay,—could we conſpire ſuch a brother's death?—could we eat bread, when reſolved to ſtarve him to death, in the bottom of a pi? Surely he, the infernal fiend, who tempted our firſt parents to tranſgreſs, in that accurſed moment, ruled in and over us. Religion,—Reaſon,—Blood, where were

were ye,—when we ſold ſuch a brother?—O the keenneſs of that remorſe, which the worthy mind experiences, on receiving favours from thoſe, to whom it hath been ungrateful or unjuſt. How much more doth it ſuffer from itſelf, than the body poſſibly could from the puniſhment, which might be juſtly inflicted? All Joſeph's power could not have effected, what their own ſenſations at this period wrought.

Like a brother indeed, he could not endure to ſee their exceſs of grief, therefore comforts them, by telling them, whatever their intentions had been, the Almighty had brought good out of them, who, though he deteſts ſin, yet often turns the wickedneſs of man to ſerve his glory. Upbraid not one another with the unfriendly deed, nor enter into diſquiſitions or contentions, about thoſe chiefly criminal. Divine Providence availed itſelf of your purpoſe, to make me the happy inſtrument of ſaving your lives. What an example for us, to comfort thoſe, that are truly humbled; however aggravated their offences may have been, leſt they ſhould be ſwallowed up of too much ſorrow. As if he had ſaid, Come, wipe away your tears, which I doubt not, but by this time ſtreamed from every eye: and inſtead of dwelling on the part you acted: turn your thoughts to the gracious iſſue, perfected by him, whoſe ways are inſcrutable to human wiſdom. The merciful intentions of Providence, ſhould now fill your heart, with the

warmeſt gratitude, and animate your tongues. Let his grace comfort you under thoſe very burdens, which you have brought upon yourſelves. Nor is it you, or yours only, but thouſands to whom I hereby have proved a preſerver, as the ſubjects of Pharaoh, the inhabitants of Canaan, and other countries can teſtify.

Verſe 6th. *For theſe two years hath the famine been in the land, and yet there are five years, in the which, there ſhall neither be earing nor harveſt.*

They had ſeen his temporal glory, and witneſſed the ſubmiſſion paid him: now like a true deſcendant of Abraham, which ſpiritually implies, poſſeſſing a portion of his faith; he tells them, how highly he was favoured of God, in that he knew how long the famine was to laſt. Hence he perhaps took occaſion to mention, the circumſtances of his wondrous promotion. What was paſt reſpecting the famine, which raged in Egypt, and the countries round about they knew; to which he adds, the appointed time of the dearth's continuance, yet to come; viz. five years, in which ſeed-time and harveſt would not be general, becauſe the peaſants knew from the prediction of Joſeph, that the produce, would be no way proportionable to the labour and expence. Some little tillage no doubt took place on the banks of the Nile, or other rich ſoils; ſtill nothing in compariſon of what their ſubſiſtence required: becauſe the prediction of Joſeph, in the opinion of expoſitors implied,

implied, that the Nile, as uſual, would not overflow his banks; it anſwered no purpoſe, to attempt to plow the land, which two years drought had rendered extremely difficult; or to throw away that corn, which would produce no ſuitable return. Far better to keep it againſt the calls of neceſſity, than waſte it. Owing to this conſideration we find, that Joſeph was able in the laſt year of the famine, to ſupply them with grain, which would bear a proper crop.

Verſe 7th. *And God ſent me before you, to preſerve you a poſterity in the earth; and to ſave your lives by a great deliverance.*

The Almighty permits ſinful actions in evil men, for reaſons beſt known to his infinite wiſdom, and perfectly reconcileable with the ſyſtem his goodneſs purſues, without being in any degree chargeable, as the author of them. All theſe it over-rules for his own glory, and the advantage of the creature. Thus God took away the poſſeſſions of Job by the Sabeans, while of Herod and Pontius Pilate it is written, that they did, whatſoever the hand and counſel of God had determined. This idea fills with confidence againſt the plots of the wicked; wherein their intentions are controuled by Omnipotence, which brings peace out of diſorder, and good out of evil, as eaſily as he from darkneſs brings light. Contrary to the cuſtom of many, whom the Divine Benignity hath eminently favoured, and raiſed to unforeſeen rank

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and power; this great man aſcribes every thing to the hand of God, and pours ſweet conſolation into the wounded ſpirits of his brethren, by fixing them on this point: whereby ſays he, I am to be the means of ſupporting you, and all yours in this time of want, by a great deliverance, that afterwards you according to the promiſe, may exceedingly increaſe and multiply; from whom in fulneſs of time the Meſſiah, the deſire of all truly religious nations is to ſpring.

Verſe 8th. *So now it was not you that ſent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his houſe, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.*

What, it may be aſked by ſome ſuperficial readers of the word of God;—Did not they ſell and ſend him? Yes, to be a ſlave, and with a view to deſtroy him: but not to be a Saviour to the Church, and a preſerver of themſelves. This was the work of the Lord, and at this moment marvellous in their eyes. Neither did they know when they ſold him to the Iſmaelites, whither he might be carried:—that he was brought to Egypt,—ſold to Potiphar,—caſt into priſon,—introduced to Pharaoh,—made lord of the country, aroſe from the deſigns of Him, who ſtilleth the raging of the ſea, and manages the tumults of the people. That in this ſpeech, he did not mean to exonerate them from all guilt, is evident from his views of it on his death bed;—But as for you, ye thought

thought evil againſt me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to paſs as it is this day, to ſave much people alive *. Notwithſtanding which, ſo deeply was his heart impreſſed, with a ſenſe of God's unmerited goodneſs, that he dwells with pleaſure on the circumſtance, and exhorts them to conſider the manifold obligations they were under, to that Being, who had done ſo much, not only for them; but for him, and for the land of ſtrangers. He wiſhed to chear them with the contemplation of that power, which had turned their malice, and his miſery, into a great mercy to thouſands. God ſaith he, hath made me a father, that is, hath given me the authority of a father with Pharaoh; ſeeing I am become his teacher and counſellor, in all things pertaining to the welfare of the kingdom: — the principal perſon in his court, and governor of the whole country, in which were ſeveral provinces and ſeparate rulers, but all, and every one, ultimately under my direction: for without me, that is in oppoſition to my order, no man dare lift up his hand or foot, in all the land of Egypt.

Verſe 9th. *Haſte you, and go up to my father, and ſay unto him: Thus ſaith thy ſon Joſeph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt, come down to me, tarry not.*

Providence can make trials the forerunners, or even meſſengers, of far better news, than their na-

* Gen. l. 20.

ture

ture ſeemed to imply. Thus on the preſent emergency, it fared both with Jacob and his ſons. Little did the good old man think, when he parted with Benjamin, that he was to return loaded with a detail of Joſeph's perſonal ſafety, happineſs and honours. Little did the ſons apprehend, when the cup was found in Benjamin's ſack, that the next time they went that way, ſhould be with all the plenty, and eaſe of accommodation, which Egypt could afford. Grace makes nature ſpeedy in the execution of duty. All good hearts are eager to remove a parent's grief, nor can wallow in abundance, while they are pinched with want. The matter being now ſo far ſettled, to their mutual ſurprize and ſatisfaction; Joſeph urges their return to Canaan, the happy meſſengers, of the moſt gladſome tidings that ever reached a parent's heart: and tell him, Oh the rapture it will convey to his heart! that his much loved, long loſt ſon ſtill lives! —and lives to crown the evening of his days, with abundance, and with peace. As ſoon as the good old man's firſt tranſports are over, which will be inſtantly followed by the devouteſt acknowledgments to Heaven; and when having compoſed his ſpirits, reſuming his wonted tenderneſs, his queſtions ſhall come ſo cloſe upon you, as ſcarce to give time for replies,—tell him, that the God of his fathers, and my God, hath made me lord of all Egypt. Well did he know this would revive the memory of antient revelations;—ſtrengthen

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his aged ſinews; and once more raiſe with joy his hoary head. Abraham had been told, that his ſeed was to be a ſtranger in a land that was not theirs; by embracing this endearing invitation, the event would be accompliſhed. However ſeverely good men may be tried, the Divine faithfulneſs ſhall not fail, but frequently inhances the joy, by the wonderful circumſtances attending the fulfilment. Joſeph alſo probably felt ſomething of the ſame joy, in recollecting what ſo good a father had inculcated on his young mind; even that God had entered into a ſpecial covenant with their race; implying ſingular protection, and numberleſs bleſſings.

Verſe 10th. *And thou ſhalt dwell in the land of Goſhen, and thou ſhalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou haſt.*

The land here mentioned was well watered, extemely adapted for cattle; at a diſtance from Egypt, and lying next to Canaan, that the children of Iſrael might remember the divine promiſe; namely, that they ſhould go out thence a great multitude. Goſhen, or Geſem, according to the Greek, was that part of Egypt, which bordered on Arabia. It ſeems to be the ſame with the land of Rameſes. And Joſeph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a poſſeſſion in the land of Egypt, in the beſt of the land, in

the land of Rameſes *; and the Heliopolitan name, which Strabo ſays was reckoned to be in Arabia, and in which were both the city of Heliopolis, and the city Heroopolis according to Ptolemy; and the learned Dr. Gill remarks, that in the Septuagint verſion of Chap. xlvi. 28. inſtead of Goſhen is Heroopolis, or the city of the heroes in the land of Rameſes, which coincides with the opinion of Joſephus. Therefore Goſhen was a province ſituate betwixt the river Nile, and the correſpondent part of the Red Sea: which Joſeph either had got a grant of from Pharaoh; or knew that from his intereſt with him, on aſking it would not be refuſed him. Or it may be, it was the domains of his father-in-law, the prieſt of On; ſince On or Onii was the metropolis of the Heliopolitan name, and might have been the dowry of Joſeph's wife. Indeed if what the Jewiſh writers ſay, be true, that a Pharaoh king of Egypt in Abraham's time gave to Sarah, the land of Goſhen for an inheritance, in virtue of whoſe right, the Iſraelites took poſſeſſion of it: this would account for Joſeph's conduct, without the intervention of Pharaoh. In oppoſition to which we contend, that it was the poſitive grant of the monarch himſelf. The land of Egypt is before thee, in the beſt of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell, in the land of

* Gen. xlvii. 11.

Goſhen

Goſhen let them dwell *: which doth not preclude Joſeph's having requeſted it, in conformity to the meſſage here ſent, "And thou ſhalt be "near me." As he would be in Goſhen, if Memphis was the royal ſeat at this time, or Heliopolis, or both in their turn: and Artapanus contends, that Memphis was the ſeat of that king of Egypt, in whoſe court Moſes was brought up. And Heliopolis may be thought to be ſo, if Joſeph dwelt where his father-in-law was prieſt and prince. Leo Africanus ſays, that the Sahidic province in which was Tirem, where the Iſraelites dwelt, was the ſeat of the nobility of the ancient Egyptians. We alſo learn from the meſſage, it was to a total removal, not only of themſelves, but of every connection, and ſeparate part of their property, which can be ſupported purely on this ground, that they acted by a divine impulſe, to fulfill the great deſigns of Providence.

Verſe 11th. *And there will I nouriſh thee, for yet there are five years of famine: leſt thou, and thy houſhold, and all that thou haſt, come to poverty.*

In that fertile ſpot with leſs offence to the Egyptians, in whoſe eyes, ſhepherds are an abomination, will I provide for your every want, and cauſe you to enjoy the bleſſings of eaſy competence. Obſerve Joſeph though in the very pinnacle of human greatneſs, is cautious of giving offence.

* Gen. xlvii. 6.

Much

Much of our felicity in the preſent ſtate of our exiſtence, depends on this. Thoſe who care not whom they offend, nay who take delight in diſturbing that peace, which frequently they cannot reſtore, we may reſt aſſured, beſides being enemies to ſociety, and ſcarce worthy of its privileges, are under the controll of their own headſtrong paſſions, and enjoy but few, if any gleams of inward quiet: Whether in high or low ſtations in life, this is apparent. Arrogancy is not more univerſally deteſted, than a mild and gentle demeanor enliſts votaries to its ſide; and a readineſs to oblige, is often the ſureſt road to the favour and protection of others. A man's manners ſome times do that for him in this world, which learning and genius could never acquire. To ſee thoſe, who with the greateſt impunity might offend, moſt aſſiduouſly guarding againſt creating the leaſt uneaſineſs in thoſe beneath them, adds dignity to their character, and ſtamps importance on their rank.

Verſe 12th. *And behold your eyes ſee, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth, that ſpeaketh unto you.*

It hath been already noticed, they muſt have had ſome recollection of his features, which would increaſe on the diſcovery, and yet from his rank might never before ſtrike them; therefore he ſays, your eyes and ears may both be witneſſes, that I your brother Joſeph ſpeak unto you, by mine own mouth, without an interpreter as before, and

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in Hebrew our common language, have told you ſuch things, as only a brother could. Some have conſidered the alluſion to Benjamin ſimply to mean, that he who could not be ſuſpected by his father, of a fraud in impoſing on him, would aſſure the Patriarch, that the governor was not an Egyptian, but a Hebrew, and by that, and other concurrent teſtimonies and proofs; that it was even that Joſeph, whoſe bloody coat, had led him to ſuppoſe him, devoured by ſome wild beaſt years ago. But I rather apprehend, his mentioning Benjamin in this verſe, does not ſo much ſhew his partiality; as probably his pointing at him by name, tends to convince them of the reality of what he ſaid, by ſingling him out from among the reſt. O Benjamin, how different are now thy feelings, from thoſe with which thou entered this room?—Thy apparently incenſed judge, is thy warm, thy affectionate brother. What a change ye brethren in general? With hearts ſunk in ſorrow you returned; and ſelf condemned could urge little or nothing, on your own behalf; yet not only freed from puniſhment, but fully juſtified, you go away rejoicing,—owned by your brother, the lord of the land;—honoured, and reſpected by all;—nay favourites with the Great King. What a picture is this of the poor humble ſinners under a ſenſe of complicated guilt, going ſelf condemned into the preſence of the Infinitely Glorious Jehovah, venturing to plead for mercy, where they are owned as

brethren by the Lord of Heaven and earth, the ſecond in dignity to nature's univerſal Sovereign: who aſſures them, he will remove their various wants, bring them from a parched and ſtarving country, to all the bleſſings of the celeſtial Goſhen:—only haſte he cries to come to me with all your hearts, all your deſires, and your powers; and whatever is moſt precious in your eſteem. What was the rapture of Joſeph's brethren, compared with theirs, who feel the joys of pardoned ſin! How joyfully did the Patriarchs reſume their ſeveral charges and commiſſions, to return to Canaan, after having both publicly and privately been regaled by Joſeph, and admitted into the cloſeſt communion with him: and with peculiar pleaſure we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, they now and then by the way, uſed ſome of the dainties of Egypt: while the ſole contention, if we dare cal lit ſo, was, who ſhould ſpeak in the worthieſt and higheſt ſtrains, of their deareſt brother's generoſity.

How eaſily may this be applied to the genuine Chriſtian? who after his terrors of guilt, and dread of puniſhment are done away, and he enabled to acknowledge his Lord, both publicly and privately, is admitted into fellowſhip with him:—regaled by him with preſent comforts, and firmly believes in greater yet to come: with alacrity he ſets out on the remaining part of his journey through life, feaſting himſelf on the precious promiſes he hath received, while to all around, he commends the unbounded compaſſion of the Giver.

Verſe

Verſe 13th. *And you ſhall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have ſeen, and ye ſhall haſte, and bring down my father hither.*

Though this ſeems a repetition of what he had before ſaid; yet it was exceeding natural, for a perſon under thoſe finer and nobler; yet higher and ſtronger emotions, which were then labouring in his boſom. Beſides, it gives us a more perfect idea, of the force and ſincerity of his filial love, and anxious regard for his father's welfare. Narrate to him, whoſe very ſoul will hang on every ſyliable, all that you have ſeen of my wealth, my grandeur, my power, and authority;—that I live in a palace;—ride in the ſecond chariot to the king, and am attended like one. And forget not, what may on reflection yield much greater ſatisfaction, that I am revered by the people at large, no mean indication, that I am ſtrictly obſervant of the laws of juſtice, and conſcientiouſly uſe the influence, which my ſtation implies. You may alſo hint my connections, having married the daughter of a Prince of the country; in conſequence whereof, I am bleſſed with two promiſing boys, whom I pant to preſent to their Grandfather, and whoſe youthful breaſts, imbued with the ſolid principles of knowledge and virtue, I ſhall have prepared againſt his arrival, to meet him with reverential reſpect, and will count it a happineſs, to hear him pronounce a bleſſing on

their heads. They will exult in ſupporting his aged ſteps, and derive the higheſt pleaſure from pointing out to him, the principal objects of a ſtranger's attention. How happy will they be, to enter into the pureſt friendſhip with their, as yet unknown relations? and though my father in his wiſdom, will pay attention to all your children, and divide his paternal regard, yet he may take a pleaſure in pouring fuller inſtructions, concerning the covenant of God,—his worſhip, and the promiſes made to our race, into the hearts of thoſe grandſons, whoſe opportunities in this land of eſtabliſhed idolatry, have been more circumſcribed.

All this he may be ſuppoſed to have ſaid, without any imputation of vain glory. For in the firſt place, what ſon ſo ſituated, could deny himſelf the pleaſure of ſtating to a father, whom he ſo highly reſpected, and who had unjuſtly ſuffered ſuch diſquietudes on his account, a minute and faithful detail of the condition, to which infinite goodneſs had raiſed him? What father, from a ſon in a far country, would not expect ſuch an account? and however proſperous, what breaſt would deem an accurate ſtatement, vain glory? Beſides, Joſeph might do this to certify his father, from the pre-eminence wherein he was, of his ability to do all he had ſaid, and to prove, that God had vouchſafed the accompliſhment of the promiſes; at leaſt ſo far.

Verſe 14th. *And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept: and Benjamin wept upon his neck.*

No ſuſceptible mind capable of delicate ſenſations, will wonder at this indearing,—this almoſt indeſcribable interview: who reflects, that theſe were the two only ſons of their deceaſed mother, that they were equal darlings of their father, and yet ſtrangers to each other, Benjamin, as ſeveral writers have conjectured, being only about an year and an half old, when Joſeph was ſold by his brethren. With ardor he fell on this amiable youth's neck; that is reclined on both ſides, warmly imprinted the hallowed kiſs on each cheek: while claſping him to his beating heart, the throbs of which, in conjunction with his weeping eyes, ſpake far more eloquently, than language could convey. Nor was Benjamin leſs affected. The reciprocity of the unſullied paſſions of nature, ſhone here in their original luſtre. And art thou him? whoſe loſs, I have ſo often heard my father deplore, in the moſt melting ſtrains of woe!—Eventful day! that puts thee in my arms! Bleſſed be the God of Abraham, of Iſaac, and of our father Jacob, for this marvellous inſtance of interpoſing, and preſerving Providence. Natural affection, muſt unqueſtionably be the ſtrongeſt in the beſt hearts. The vicious character, is neceſſarily a ſtranger to pure enjoyments. But where religion hath purified the affections, and renewed the

whole man, there, every ſocial and tender tie, whether from nature, friendſhip, or blood, are doubly cemented, and ſtamp the beauty of holineſs, on every part of the life and converſation. No ſtranger intermeddleth with ſuch joys, as now animated the hearts of Joſeph, and his Benjamin.

Verſe 15th. *Moreover he kiſſed all his brethren, and wept upon them, and after that, his brethren talked with him.*

It was natural for him to kiſs Benjamin firſt; eſpecially, as he immediately, with a ſincere and reconciled heart, paid the ſame compliment to all the reſt: perhaps beginning with Judah, who had ſo warmly pleaded the cauſe of his father and brother. During the firſt ſtages, probably their amazement kept them from ſpeaking. Violent ſhocks, or deep diſtreſs ſometimes produce this effect. Hear holy Aſaph: I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my ſpirit was overwhelmed. Thou holdeſt mine eyes waking, I am ſo troubled, that I cannot ſpeak *. Whereas now their fears being all ended, and their mutual careſſes over; they entered into minute converſation with him; wherein they might probably inform him, of what had happened in their family, ſince their commiſſion of the unnatural, and barbarous act of ſelling him. Every ſyllable relative to Jacob, would be marked peculiarly, and heard by

* Pſ. lxxvii. 3, 4.

Joſeph

Joſeph with uncommon attention; nor is it unreaſonable to imagine, that he, in his turn would communicate ſeveral particulars, relative to himſelf, which would both attract and intereſt them: beſides the view of their ultimately proving ſo many cogent motives, for haſtening his honoured father thither.

Look ye malicious and revengeful, at this amiable picture of humanity;—and ſay, if there is nothing in it worthy of your imitation? nay, ſuch are the native charms of virtue, that we dare even appeal to you, whether there is not ſomething in it of an engaging and heavenly kind? What can ennoble the ſons of duſt and frailty, more than the exertions of diſintereſted friendſhip, which hath for its baſe the forgiveneſs of injuries? This indeed makes the face to ſhine, like that of Moſes, after he had been on the mount with God: and in our eſtimation of each other, ought to obliterate every other imperfection, incident to the preſent ſtate of our exiſtence. Joſeph in all his gorgeous apparel and princely retinue:—Joſeph in the ſecond chariot, and thouſands in the ſtreets of Egypt, bending the knee before him, was inferior to Joſeph bending on his brethren's neck; and urging their haſte to bring his parent to his arms. What more infamous could they have attempted, than what they had done?—Were they not murderers in intention? Yet mark their injured brother forgiving, nay ſoothing thoſe con-

ſciences, which juſtly ſmote them. Contraſt this ye diſcerning few, with thoſe profeſſors of Chriſtianity, whoſe pretenſions to ſuperior holineſs, are ſtoutly ſupported by themſelves, and moſt vehemently urged: who nevertheleſs diſplay the utmoſt implacability towards their fellow-creatures, and all this, without the ſhadow of any injury received, but merely, that in ſome matters they think not as they do. A religious bigot, is generally one of the worſt of human characters; implying every thing hypocritical to God, and falſe to man. Look again we ſay at Joſeph,—and ſay, whether next to the love of God, there be a purer paſſion in the human breaſt, than natural affection? Is there any thing more lovely than philanthropy, leaping over the narrow boundaries of caſual offences, or undeſigned injuries? Is there any thing more deteſtable than ſtrife and contention among brethren? It ruins the body, adds to our inconveniences, and obſcures every faculty of the mind. All this prevents it not; no more than the divine aſſertion, that if we love not our brother whom we have ſeen, we cannot love God. See the tumults in ſociety at large:—in private circles of neighbours, and thoſe who once called themſelves friends: nay even in families, how often may we ſee members thereof, not ſpeaking to one another for years, perhaps dying in that unchriſtian ſpirit, who were nevertheleſs punctual at church,—private prayer,—and taking the Sacrament. May not the Almighty

ſay to ſuch,—Out of your own mouths will I condemn you:—You aſk forgiveneſs on the condition of your own diſcharging it.—Be it unto you accordingly. Heard you thoſe ſounds ye infatuated mortals! is there an enemy you have upon earth, whom you would not cordially embrace? Or if you did not, who would commiſerate your deſtruction? Tell me not how deeply you have ſuffered,—the ingratitude of thoſe who made you ſuffer, and the complicated circumſtances of injuſtice or fraud, that accompanied the various ſteps leading to the act. The higher idea of virtue and genuine goodneſs, will it manifeſt in you to forgive; and perhaps the generous deed may re-kindle the latent, though not extinguiſhed ſeeds of worth, in the breaſt of the object; who, may thereby be reclaimed, as well as bound to you, and your intereſt for ever.

Would we farther raiſe our views, to the moral government of that Infinitely Wiſe Being, who ruleth in the armies of Heaven, and doth among the inhabitants of this lower world, according to his will and pleaſure: whoſe are the kingdoms of the earth, and yet numbers the hairs of our heads: where can we turn with greater proſpect of improvement, than to this hiſtory of Joſeph: every part of which is full of wonders; yet beams with goodneſs. How impenetrable to us are the ways of Divine Wiſdom! owing to this,

this, among other cauſes, that it frequently ſeems to turn back on its end, and yet that is the very way it reaches it. As a proof of which, follow Joſeph through all the revolutions of his life. Obſerve the hatred his brethren bear to him:—his father's tenderneſs ſeems a counterpoiſe to that. The dreams which he relates, and which foretel his promotion, confirm him in the opinion, that it will infallibly come to paſs. And yet thoſe very dreams increaſe the hatred of his brethren, and put them on ſelling him. Let us follow him to Egypt, and accompany him to Potiphar's houſe, where his ſucceſs and prudence, in the management of his maſter's concerns, begins to afford ſome rays of hope, which in the mere eye of reaſon all vaniſh, on his being accuſed of a heinous crime, and impriſoned. What ſteps are here, towards his becoming a deliverer, and a deliverer of his family? It ſeems loſt to him, as he is to it:—the time paſſes on, his fortune continues the ſame. The interpretation of the dreams of two of Pharaoh's ſervants, which ſeemed to tend to a change in his favour, leaves him ſtill two years in priſon. At laſt Pharaoh's dreams begin to open a new ſcene.—Joſeph becomes the deliverer of a kingdom, but the main point is wanting. He ſtill continues loſt to his family, he hears no news of them, in eight years after his promotion; and his father has now mourned for him nineteen.

The

The venerable Jacob neareſt to his greateſt joy, finds his afflictions doubled. The famine is a trifle to him, compared with his parting with his dear Benjamin: —— he apprehends he has nothing now to do but to die; while ere long, he paſſes from the bittereſt grief, to the higheſt joy he had ever known. Would not means ſo contrary to ſuch an end have confounded us? Nevertheleſs, behold how goodneſs and wiſdom concurred!—But did juſtice act in concert? What injuſtice did it not permit? An innocent perſon impriſoned like criminal. Wait the event. Juſtice will not loſe its right; it will more than compenſate all the ſufferings of the innocent, with a glory which he had never acquired without theſe ſufferings. It will bring the agents of injuſtice to his feet: it will make them feel the retribution of their violence by grievous remorſe: in ſhort, they, and their little ones, ſhall owe their lives to him they would have killed. Can a more complete compenſation be imagined? The hiſtory of Moſes, Job, David, Eſther, and Daniel, have on the whole ſome reſemblance with that of Joſeph. All theſe were conducted to happineſs through roads, which they would never have choſen, and which apparently ſeemed to carry them from it. The iſſue however ſufficiently juſtifies the Divine perfections of juſtice, wiſdom, and goodneſs.

Though

Though Joſeph is not ſo expreſsly mentioned in the New Teſtament, as a type of Chriſt, as Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob: yet the analogy is very clear: which we ſhall ſtate very briefly. Joſeph was eminent both as to wiſdom and holineſs. He had a prophetical light ſhining in him; and when ſolicited by his miſtreſs, he overcame the temptation. So in Chriſt are hid all the treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge. He is the wonderful Counſellor, the true Palmoni, or numberer of ſecrets: who is alone worthy to take the book of life, and to open its ſeals. When Chriſt was tempted to ſpiritual adultery, he baffled the tempter. Like Joſeph Chriſt was a well beloved ſon: in whom it hath pleaſed the Father, that all fulneſs ſhould dwell. Of Joſeph it was ſaid, The archers have ſorely grieved him, and ſhot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in ſtrength, and the arms of his hands were made ſtrong, by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. What inhanced the ſeverity of theſe ſufferings was; that they were inflicted chiefly by his brethren, or through their inſtrumentality. In like manner Chriſt ſuffered from his brethren the Jews; nay his own familiar, who eat bread with him, lift up the heel againſt him. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous, but who is able to ſtand before envy? Moved with which the Patriarchs ſold Joſeph: and it is ſaid of Chriſt, that Pilate knew, that for envy

they

they had delivered him. When did they do this injury to Joſeph?—when he was ſhewing kindneſs, and doing good to them. For his father had ſent him to ſeek and viſit his brethren in the wilderneſs. When the ſent of God, came to viſit his brethren the ſons of men: the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing, to plot againſt the Lord, and againſt his anointed. Joſeph's brethren ſtript him of the garments which his father made for him; and of Jeſus Chriſt it is ſaid, They parted my garments among them, and caſt lots for my veſture. Joſeph's brethren thought they had made ſure work of it, when they had him in the pit: the Jews imagined themſelves victorious, when they nailed him to the croſs. Joſeph was ſold for a ſervant, in which ſtation he demeaned himſelf with propriety. Chriſt was ſold for the price of a ſlave, and was faithful in things pertaining to God and man, according to the declaration of the Prophet;—Behold my ſervant ſhall deal prudently, he ſhall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high *.

Look next at the Patriarch in his advancement. Thou ſhalt be over my houſe ſaith Pharaoh. And ſaith the Apoſtle, And he hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church †. Hear how ſweetly the

* Iſaiah, liv. 13. † Eph. i. 22.

Pſalmiſt

Pſalmiſt deſcribes this point in the 105th Pſalm! He ſent a man before them, even Joſeph, who was ſold for a ſervant: whoſe feet they hurt with fetters, he was laid in iron until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him. The King ſent, and looſed him: even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his houſe, and ruler of all his ſubſtance. To bind his princes at his pleaſure, and teach his ſenators wiſdom. See his once ſtout-hearted brethren ſtand trembling before him! ſo the Jews, ſhall at leaſt humble themſelves before him, whom they have pierced, and ſhall mourn. Mark the ſimilitude betwixt them in their carriage towards their brethren; and in the forgiveneſs of injuries. Each requited good for evil; each ſaved their bitter enemies, and the Saviour even prayed for thoſe who crucified him. Joſeph knew his brethren, though they knew not him. With an everlaſting love have I loved thee, ſaith Chriſt to the true penitent: or as he did to the maſter in Iſrael, I ſaw thee when thou waſt under the fig-tree. Joſeph carried it roughly to them at firſt, to bring them to a frame of mind, the propereſt for the joys he meant to communicate. So the Saviour firſt breaks the heart with the ſenſe of follies it hath done, then heals every wound. He frowns before he ſmiles. Liſten to the account he gives of himſelf,—He hath ſent me to bind up the broken hearted,

hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the priſon to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the days of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for aſhes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praiſe for the ſpirit of heavineſs.

In the critical moment Joſeph reveals himſelf, in the moſt melting expreſſions of tendereſt love and regard. So the Redeemer, to the benighted ſoul, almoſt deſpairing of help, and taking all the guilt and blame on themſelves; paſſionately cries with Divine Mercy in his eyes, and full pardon in his hands; Behold me,—behold me! I am Jeſus thy brother,—thy Saviour,—whom thou ſold for the practice of ſin, and the baubles of a preſent life, which thou haſt been deeply regretting. I have ſeen thy tears, and heard the voice of thy ſupplications, and proteſt that thou art precious in my ſight: I am thine, and thou art mine. Then he largely ſheds abroad his love in the heart, by the Holy Ghoſt. Joſeph was not more careful to ſupply all the wants of his brethren, and to make proviſion for them every way, than our glorious Immanuel; who gives us all the good we need; and that freely, without money, and without price. He waſheth us outwardly by the water of baptiſm, and cleanſeth us inwardly by his ſpirit; feeds us in Providence

Providence with bodily, and at his table with ſpiritual food:—gives us his ordinances as chariots of ſalvation to bring us to himſelf; and ſigns and ſeals of his love to us, and of our love to him, and to one another. He plants us in Goſhen, in a ſtate of light and grace, till we come to the heavenly Canaan, that is above. Had the brethren of Joſeph, ſome ſecret fears, and doubtings of his love for a while? So it may fare with the ſaints, while on this ſide the grave: but then theſe doubts and fears ſtir them up to greater activity, and diligence in the ſpiritual life. They on that account, become more watchful, more circumſpect, more ſerious, more heavenly minded: they call into exerciſe each latent grace and virtue—reflect upon their former way, and ſearch themſelves by the help of God's word; crying in the prayers of faith, on the perfect merits of the Son, what I ſee not, ſhew me; what I know not, teach me; pardon my ſins, and in all I do, or ſay, or think, with thine eye ſet upon me,—O Almighty God give me direction. In theſe gracious exerciſes, the Lord renews his love, bids them fear not, cautions them againſt falling out by the way, and ſo both quiets the tumult of their thoughts, and ſtrengthens them for the performance of every duty.

While we readily forgive injuries, and load with kindneſs, even thoſe that may have mal-treated

us—

us—while we labour to do all the good we can; let us ſtill remember to ſit ſo looſe to the enjoyments of a preſent life, that when we are called, with chearfulneſs may we forſake the ſtuff of all terreſtrial things, to be with our elder Brother, where he is; enjoying thoſe bleſſings, that are with Jeſus Chriſt, and on the head of him, that was ſeparated from his brethren. Amen, and Amen.

EXPOSITION IV.

On ISAIAH, Chap. XII.

And in that day thou ſhalt ſay, O Lord, I will praiſe thee, though thou waſt angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedſt me. Behold, God *is* my ſalvation: I will truſt, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah *is* my ſtrength and *my* ſong, he alſo is become my ſalvation. Therefore with joy ſhall ye draw water out of the wells of ſalvation. And in that day ſhall ye ſay, Praiſe the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things: this *is* known in all the earth. Cry out, and ſhout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great *is* the holy One of Iſrael in the midſt of thee.

SEARCH the Scriptures, ſaid our bleſſed Redeemer when on earth, for theſe are they which teſtify of me, and in which, the proofs of immortality are moſt clear and full. In theſe oracles of the living God, truth ſhines in its native majeſty, and pureſt wiſdom, with an undecaying beauty. Creation, the various diſpenſations of

Providence, and of the will of God, with the nature of man, in its original;—in its fallen ſtate;—the way and means of its recovery through Chriſt;—with its future ſtate, together with the double nature, office, and government of the Meſſiah, are the ſubjects of theſe pages of inſpiration. Human happineſs conſiſts in enjoyment of God, and our duty in acting conformably to his will: and where is the pleaſure reſulting from the firſt, or the propereſt method of diſcharging the latter, equally deſcribed, as in the ſacred records? Where elſe can we go to learn the holy commandments of our adorable Creator? and the way of attaining a likeneſs to his glorious image; ſo eſſential to real felicity: ſince they alone, ſupplying us, with the nobleſt, and juſteſt ideas of the perfections of the Divine Nature, and our reſpective obligations, tending to raiſe our views to the ſublimeſt objects, and to make us wiſe unto ſalvation. Every thing abſolutely connected with our preſent peace, or final happineſs; is ſo plain, that he who runs may read: though there are many myſteries intermingled, which the utmoſt reach of the at beſt frail judgment of man, cannot comprehend. This will ultimately elucidate, the infinite wiſdom of the Supreme Being, and appear to have been requiſite for the anſwering of many important ends. However inexplicable, they may be upon the whole to us; yet from the nature of God, the ſeveral manifeſtations of his goodneſs, and from that part of them

them in the courſe of things already unfolded, inſtead of totally rejecting them, much leſs caſting ridicule on them, let us humbly adore them, as valuable truths, and ſhould the matter be merely prophetical, let us remain perſuaded, that the events prefigured, will in due time be accompliſhed. Deiſts in general, have pointed their artillery, more againſt thoſe myſteries of the doctrinal, than prophetical kind. The reaſon of this is very obvious, namely, its being much eaſier to contend longer about the meaning of phraſes, and articles of faith, than events foretold, the fulfilment whereof, carried poſitive evidence along with them. No mean proof of the truth of Chriſtianity, is drawn from the literal accompliſhment of prophecy; and the cloſer the latter is ſtudied, the more inconteſtible is the former. By this we mean not to deny, that many writers have attempted the taſk, who were in no ways qualified for it. Their ignorance, hath furniſhed opponents, with the ſtrongeſt handle. Can it be denied that vanity hath too much influenced, and vague fancy, or an idle curioſity been too much indulged by many, who have endeavoured to determine the time and times of Daniel, and the book of the Revelations? In our own time, how aſhamed ought ſome to look? Nevertheleſs, this ſhould not deter us from, but only render us more cautious, and guarded in our farther reſearches, and determinations: while we acknowledge, that the meaning of ſome of the ob-

ſcureſt prophecies, have by intelligent writers been given; and the circumſtances adequately aſcertained.

Before we proceed to the examination of the celebrated chapter now read; it may not be diſpleaſing to ſome, that we ſay a few things relative to the order of time, wherein the Prophets delivered their meſſage. By ſome they have been divided into the greater, and the leſſer, the firſt including Iſaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; the other, the ſubſequent twelve; not that the former had greater authority, but from their being more voluminous. When each of them flouriſhed, hath been matter of greater contention among Divines, without entering into the minutiæ of which, permit us to remark, that Elijah, and his ſucceſſor Eliſha, carried down the prophetical office, till pretty near the time, when thoſe appeared, whoſe prophecies in the ſacred canon form diſtinct books; none of whom, ſeem to have been previous, to the reign of Jeroboam, ſon of Joaſh King of Iſrael. Another thing worthy of notice is, that computations in Scripture are more uſually made, by the reigns of the Kings of Judah, many of whom were worthy characters; than of thoſe of Iſrael, who, David and Solomon excepted, were all bad.

Previous to the Babyloniſh captivity, in the days of the aforeſaid Jeroboam, and of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Joſiah, Kings of Judah, the following

lowing propheſied, which we ſhall name in their proper order.

Jonah propheſied before, or about the beginning of the reign of Jeroboam, who, as we are told, Reſtored the coaſt of Iſrael, from the entering of Hamath to the ſea of the plain, according to the word of the Lord God of Iſrael, which he ſpake by the hand of his ſervant Jonah, the ſon of Amittai the Prophet, which was of Gath-hepher *.

Hoſea, as may be collected from the firſt verſe of his prophecy, lived under Jeroboam the ſon of Joaſh King of Iſrael; and in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah, which, indiſputably, takes in a period of at leaſt ſeventy-nine years.

The time of Joel is not ſo expreſsly marked in Scripture; therefore abundant matter of critical diſcuſſion hath hence ariſen. Some have idly ſuppoſed him the ſon of Samuel, becauſe he had one of the name. Others think, that he was cotemporary with Jehoſaphat King of Judah, and Jehoram King of Iſrael: ſeeing, that as Eliſha foretold the ſeven years famine, Joel deſcribed how it ſhould come to paſs, by locuſts, canker-worms, and caterpillars. But, as in this prophecy, there is no mention made of the ten tribes, we deem it more reaſonable to ſuppoſe, it was after they had been

* Kings, xiv. 25.

carried away. The Hebrew Chronicle ſays, that he lived under Manaſſeh, of courſe was coeval with Nahum and Habbakuk. Another claſs are of opinion, that the famine threatened by Joel, fell out under Joſiah King of Judah, from the ſimilarity of the deſcription, which Jeremiah gives of the famine to that of Joel. Whereas the majority apprehend, he ſpake in the order, in which we have placed him; next to Hoſea, and before Amos: for Joel foretels the drought, which Amos complained, had not brought forth the due fruits of repentance. Another argument for this is, that Joel mentions not only the name of Judah and Jeruſalem, but alſo of Iſrael; conſequently before their captivity, for where the time of the prophecy is not mentioned, nor any peculiar alluſion to Iſrael, as a diſtinct kingdom from Judah; it might with probability be inferred, that the diſtinction had ceaſed.

Amos propheſied againſt Iſrael in the days of Jeroboam, and in the days of Uzziah King of Judah, two years before the earthquake.

Iſaiah, called by ſome the Evangeliſt of the Jews, ſpake by Divine Inſpiration in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah; as may be collected from ſeveral parts of his prophecy. He began not till towards the latter end of Uzziah's reign, and Jeroboam died in the fifteenth year of it, which accounts for his not being mentioned.

Micah

Micah fixes his meſſage to the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah. It hath been urged, that ſome of his hearers were alive in the days of Jehoiakim, in proof of which they quote Jer. xxvi. 18. Micah the Moraſthite propheſied in the days of Hezekiah King of Judah, and ſpake to all the people of Judah, ſaying: Thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, Zion ſhall be plowed like a field, and Jeruſalem ſhall become heaps, and the mountain of the houſe, as the high places of the foreſt. Now, we admit the elders of the land did thus reaſon in the preſence of Jehoiakim; and the poſſibility that ſome might be then alive, who had heard Micah, but do the words above read prove it? By no means. On the contrary, they ſeem rather to be merely an argument, drawn from precedents, to the caſe then before them.

Nahum directs his prophecy chiefly againſt the Metropolis of Aſſyria, conſequently a conſiderable number of years after Jonah: at whoſe preaching Nineveh turned from its wickedneſs. Not many years afterwards they relapſed; ſeeing we find Pul one of their ſovereigns, uſing all his ſtrength, till bribed by gold, to blot out the Jewiſh religion; a plain proof, they had forgot the obligations, they once acknowledged to the God of the Jews, for ſaving them from deſtruction. At length Shalmaneſer carried away all the ten tribes into Aſſyria, whom he tyrannized over, therefore God ſent Nahum to threaten Nineveh, and the nation in general,

neral, for the cruelties they exerciſed towards the captive Iſraelites. As the captivity took place in the ninth year of Hoſhea King of Iſrael, and the ſixth of Hezekiah King of Judah, we may ſuppoſe that about the laſt years of Hezekiah's reign, Nahum for the comfort of the Iſraelites, denounced the Divine threatenings againſt their oppreſſors.

Habbakkuk flouriſhed under Manaſſeh or Joſiah, and before the days of Zedekiah, which we collect, from his ſo penſively lamenting the complicated guilt, and notorious vices of the people in thoſe times: and moreover from this ſtriking circumſtance; that he forewarns them of their merited, and approaching deſtruction by the Chaldeans.

Relative to Zephaniah, we know that he taught the mind and will of God, during the reign of Joſiah the ſon of Amos King of Judah, nor is it clear, he ever acted in that character, after the King's death.

The next diviſion of the Prophets is, of thoſe who flouriſhed near to, under, or perhaps after the Babyloniſh captivity.

Here the firſt place undoubtedly belongs to Jeremiah, who taught under the ſpecial influence of the Almighty, in the thirteenth year of Joſiah's reign, and in the days of Jehoiakim, to the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, when the captivity took place. When Jeruſalem was taken, Jeremiah was in priſon. By order of the King of Babylon,

Babylon, he was carefully looked after, ſet at liberty, and for ſome time dwelt with Gedaliah the governor. After that, he was carried into Egypt, where for two years he propheſied againſt Judah, Egypt, and almoſt all the countries round about. He propheſied forty-three years—nineteen under Joſiah,—eleven under Jehoiakim,—eleven under Zedekiah, and two in Egypt. As to the Lamentations, ſome think they were written upon occaſion of good King Joſiah's death: in which he laments many calamities of the people, which then began, nor ended, but with their total overthrow. This opinion ſeems probable, from its being the manner of the Prophets to deſcribe future things, as if they were already come to paſs. And becauſe it is ſaid, Jeremiah lamented for Joſiah, and all the ſinging men and ſinging women, ſpake of Joſiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Iſrael, and behold they are written in the Lamentations *. Others conceive, that the manner is ſuch, and that the expreſſions, are ſuch pathetic deſcriptions of Jeruſalem's calamities, that indicate its being wrote, after the deſtruction of the city.

Daniel flouriſhed, from the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, to the third year of the monarchy of Cyrus the Perſian, a period of about ſeventy-nine years.

* 2 Chron. xxxv. 25.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel began to prophecy in the fifth year of Jehoiakim's captivity, and went on, till the twenty-fifth.

When Obadiah wrote is not ſo clear. Some think it was the ſame perſon, who hid the Prophets from the rage of Jezabel. Others make him cotemporary with Amos, which was about one hundred years after Ahab.—A third claſs of writers, ſuppoſe he was cotemporary with Jeremiah, as both of them prophecy againſt the Idumeans, in almoſt the ſame phraſes. Now Jeremiah propheſied againſt Edom, after he was carried into Egypt.

After the return from captivity flouriſhed,

Haggai, who ſpoke in the ſecond year of Darius, and ceaſed acting in a public capacity, the ninth month of that year.

Zechariah began in the ſecond year of Darius, and continued till the fourth year.

Malachi was the laſt Prophet of the Old Teſtament, after whom prophecy ceaſed, till Jeſus Chriſt, the great Prophet, was revealed in the fleſh. As Haggai and Zechariah, ſtrengthened the people's hands in the building of the temple; ſo Malachi reproves their ingratitude, in corrupting the true worſhip of God, not long after the temple was built.

To return from this digreſſion, which to ſome may have appeared unneceſſary, it is obvious, that among the ſeveral great events, which are foretold by

by the Prophets, and ſtill hid in the womb of Providence, none has a greater title to our ſerious attention, than the converſion of the Jews, which together with the fall of Anti-chriſt, or in other words, the uſurpation of the church of Rome, over the conſciences of men; and the univerſality of the Redeemer's kingdom, implying an end of the deluſions of Mahomet, and idolatry of every ſpecies; are to be accompliſhed in the courſe of things, previous to the diſſolution of this world. How cloſely, theſe three grand events may be connected in the fulfillment, is what the human underſtanding cannot pretend to divine? Whether any, or all of them, ſhall be effected by mere moral agency, or the more immediate interpoſitions of Omnipotence, is another of the arcana of the Moſt High.

It muſt be known, to all enjoying the benefits of revelation, that the Jews were, for reaſons concealed from us, the choſen people of God; over whom in a ſingular manner he had preſided, and vouchſafed to raiſe up animated leaders, who by his aſſiſtance ſhould conduct them, through every difficulty. He moreover, ſent them eminent prophets, of whom we have juſt been ſpeaking, to inſtruct them in his mind and will: and particularly to confirm the promiſe, and point out the exalted nature, and ſuperior efficacy of thoſe better things to come. So often repeated was the prophecy of the Meſſiah; as totally removed all doubts concerning

cerning the certainty of his appearance, yet ſeeing the preciſe time was not exactly limited, however plain the marks given of it; and their ſins were great, their prejudices ſtrong; ſo far were they from acknowledging him, when in fact he made his appearance, that notwithſtanding the inconteſtible proofs he gave of his divine miſſion, they put him to death, in the moſt ignominious manner, as if he had been the vileſt impoſtor. Hitherto have they continued avowed enemies to our Bleſſed Redeemer, and the ſceptre of his mediatorial kingdom. Is this obſtinacy of that unhappy nation impenetrable? Will they never yield their cordial aſſent to the word of our ſalvation? They will,—they muſt in conſequence of its being predicted in the word of God; that they ſhall yet bow their necks to the Chriſtian yoke, and be lively aſſertors of the doctrines of the Goſpel. The prophet Zechariah aſſures us, that in a ſpiritual ſenſe the Lord will yet comfort Zion, and ſhall yet chooſe Jeruſalem: when the man whoſe name is the branch, ſhall grow out of his place. Even he ſhall build the temple of the Lord, and he ſhall bear the glory, and ſhall ſit and rule upon his throne, and he ſhall be a prieſt upon his throne, and the counſel of peace ſhall be between them both. For ſaith the Almighty, I will pour upon the houſe of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, the ſpirit of grace and of ſupplications; and they ſhall look upon me, whom they have pierced, and they

ſhall

ſhall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only ſon, and ſhall be in bitterneſs for him, as one that is in bitterneſs for his firſt-born.

In the illuſtration of no one article, do the ſacred writers employ a greater variety of images, and force of language, than on the reſtoration of Iſrael, after all the calamities, which their aggravated guilt ſhould bring upon them. They inform us, that the brighteſt day is to follow their gloomieſt night: and that their glory, which ſhall not only languiſh and be obſcured; but really ſeem to have expired, ſhall revive, and flouriſh in immortal youth. Many of the promiſes of the Old Teſtament, we confeſs, have a direct reference to the delivery of the Iſraelites, from the Babyloniſh captivity. Others of them, may ſafely be applied to thoſe in every clime, who ſhould become believers in the Meſſiah, and ſubject themſelves to the ſceptre of his grace, who in fact are the true Iſrael of God. At the ſame time, there are ſome paſſages, which appear more peculiarly deſigned for the Jewiſh nation; yet reaching beyond Babylon and Chaldea, point at the bliſsful days of the Meſſiah's univerſal government, when Jew and Gentile, ſhall be joined in the evangelical faith of our exalted Immanuel, and unfeigned love to one another: when to uſe the language of inſpiration, Ephraim ſhall no more envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim. Nor is there a Prophet,

who hath ſpoke more fully of theſe things, than Iſaiah.

In the preceding chapter, this bard, whoſe hallowed lips were touched with fire, had foretold the coming of the Meſſiah, briefly pointed out the excellency of his government, with the pure and perfect peace, that ſhould attend his reign, and be the characteriſtic of his genuine followers, when the wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid: together with the extent of his dominion, in that the Gentiles ſhould ſeek to it: for his ſway ſhall be from ſea to ſea, and from the river, even to the ends of the earth. From the 11th verſe to the concluſion of the chapter, he moſt unreſervedly ſpeaks of that deliverance, which Omnipotence would atchieve for his people, from the deplorable condition, they would reduce themſelves to, by crucifying the Lord of Glory. After which wonderful inſtances of the divine favour, they would, with one accord, join in lauding his great and venerable name, who rules over all. As Moſes, and the children of Iſrael ſang a ſong of praiſe, upon their miraculous deliverance from the land of Egypt, the hoſt of Pharaoh, and the Red Sea: in like manner, ſhall they do in that day, when the Lord ſhall bring back their ſpiritual captivity, and free them from their unwarrantable attachment to rites and ceremonies, or in other words to prejudices of whatever kind. When the root of Jeſſe ſhall ſtand

for an enſign of the people, and ſhall be the deſire, and joy of all nations. On which account we conſider the converſion of the Jews, to be that which the Prophet principally refers to in the chapter before us: without entering into the ſeparate arguments for it, or the minuter circumſtances, we ſhall be content with marking one or two of the remarkable places in ſcripture, alluding to the ſame period. After our evangelical Prophet, in the 65th chapter of his prophecy had foretold, the calling of the Gentiles, the impiety of the Jews in rejecting a Saviour, with the diſmal conſequences thereof, he adds, verſes 18, 19. But be you glad, and rejoice for ever in that which I create, for behold, I create Jeruſalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jeruſalem, and joy in my people, and the voice of weeping ſhall be no more heard in her. And in chapter lix. 20, 21. And the Redeemer ſhall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from tranſgreſſion in Jacob, ſaith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, ſaith the Lord, my ſpirit, which is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, ſhall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy ſeed, nor out of the mouth of thy ſeed's ſeed, ſaith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever. Admitting theſe expreſſions, might be underſtood of true believers in general: yet, who can deny, that they with propriety may be viewed, as relative

to Iſrael in particular: eſpecially, ſince the natural explication of other places in Scripture require it, where ſuch expreſſions occur, as certainly import ſomething more, than the temporal deliverance from Babylonian ſlavery. Witneſs theſe verſes from Ezek. 34. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Iſrael, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. And I will ſet up one ſhepherd over them, and he ſhall feed them, even my ſervant David, he ſhall feed them, and he ſhall be their ſhepherd. And they ſhall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither ſhall the beaſts of the land devour them, but they ſhall dwell ſafely, and none ſhall make them afraid. And I will raiſe up for them a plant of renown, and they ſhall be no more conſumed with hunger in the land, for ye are the flock of my paſture, and I am your God, ſaith the Lord God, who will make a covenant of peace with them, it ſhall be an everlaſting covenant. The Apoſtle Paul corroborates this view of the matter, when he ſays, For I would not brethren, that ye ſhould be wiſe in your own conceits, that blindneſs in part is happened to Iſrael, untill the fulneſs of the Gentiles be come in, and ſo all Iſrael ſhall be ſaved *.

* Rom. xi. 25.

Verſe

Verſe 1ſt. *And in that day thou ſhalt ſay, O Lord, I will praiſe thee, though thou waſt angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comforteſt me.*

From the above obſervations, we hope it appears, that by the remarkable day here ſpecified, ſomething more is meant, than deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. In the tenth chapter, we acknowledge the juſt parallel, drawn between Egypt and Babylon, afflicting the Iſraelites: intimating, that the latter ſhould be deſtroyed, as well as the former. Therefore, thus ſaith the Lord God of hoſts, O my people that dwelleſt in Zion, be not afraid of the Aſſyrian, he ſhall ſmite thee with a rod, and ſhall lift up his ſtaff againſt thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation ſhall ceaſe, and mine anger in their deſtruction. And the Lord of hoſts ſhall ſtir up a ſcourge for him, according to the ſlaughter of Midian, at the rock of Oreb, and as his rod was upon the ſea, ſo ſhall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it ſhall come to paſs in that day, that his burden ſhall be taken away from off thy ſhoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck. In conſequence whereof the Jews ſhall join in thankful ſongs, like this, or that in the 25th, or more particularly the 26th chapter of this prophecy, that by theſe public ſongs, their hearts might be more affected with the divine favour, and their memories more firmly

retain the ſenſe thereof. Admitting the juſtneſs of applying this ſong to that celebrated event; yet as that, like the paſſage through the Red Sea, was typical of the redemption wrought by Chriſt; in that ſenſe, we in this expoſition, ſhall chiefly examine the words.

In that day wherein Iſrael ſhall ſay, O Lord, I will praiſe thee, is meant, thoſe refreſhing ſeaſons from before the preſence of the moſt High; when God ſhall replace that ſtiff-necked people in the true Church, and in the ſpiritual hope of their Fathers: when they ſhall no longer oppoſe the proofs of Chriſtianity; but with the deepeſt humility, ſhall acknowledge the completion of their much valued prophecies in Mary's ſon: their joyful work will then be to praiſe the Father of Angels, but the friend of man, for his compaſſion, and unbounded goodneſs, manifeſted in their deliverance from obſtinacy, and the groſſeſt ignorance. The Targum is, "And thou ſhalt ſay at that time, I will confeſs before the Lord, for that I have ſinned before thee, thine anger is upon me, but when I am turned to the law, thine anger will turn from me, and thou wilt have mercy on me." The glorious and amiable views of the divine perfections, which they have now obtained, ſhall be their delightful theme, and to improve them to the beſt advantage, ſhall be the buſineſs of their lives. In that day, when thou, after having been a gazing-ſtock to all nations of

the earth, and in thy rejected ſtate, a ſingular proof of the veracity of Prophecy, ſhalt own the promiſed Meſſiah to be that Jeſus, whom your nation under Pontius Pilate crucified; and putting off the Moſaic yoke, cordially embrace the Chriſtian faith, gratitude ſhall ſo fill and warm thy heart, ariſing from a ſenſe of the greatneſs of the benefit, and thy inveterate oppoſition, ſo many centuries, to the truth, that thy lips will be unable to expreſs it. For that praiſe can never be acceptable to the Source of wiſdom, and the Searcher of hearts, which proceeds from ignorant admiration; or wonder, not founded on ſome knowledge of the object adored. A ſerious, rational contemplation of the Majeſty of Heaven, ought always to precede the ſervices we attempt, and the praiſes which we offer to him. Such praiſe implies, the deepeſt ſenſe of what we owe in every reſpect to our Creator; and is beſt ſhewn by a regular performance of our duty. Were the cattle on a thouſand hills our's, and offered on his altar, this would not be ſo unequivocal a proof of our love to God, as uniformly walking in the way of his commandments; and wiping away the tear, from injured, or modeſt merit.

With regard to the Jews, who have for ſo long a time been overwhelmed with temporal and ſpiritual plagues, accounted as vagabonds on the face of the earth, and in moſt places, without any regular altar or prieſt:—their Urim and

Thummim ſhine no more;—for they are drowned in the abyſs of fatal darkneſs, the natural effect of vicious practices, and deep-rooted prejudices. How then will they magnify the Redeemer, when they conſider the greatneſs of the divine mercy, in opening their eyes, to perceive the marvellous light of the Goſpel? In this ſenſe, confeſſion makes a part of praiſe, and if ſo, how will the Jews lament their blind adherence to the hope of their Fathers, notwithſtanding the cleareſt evidence of the object thereof, having in reality appeared in the very way, place, and manner deſcribed by their own writers? Now they ſee how egregiouſly they were miſtaken, in their notions of the perſon, offices, and government of the Meſſiah, and how exactly he fulfilled every particular, which the law or Prophets had teſtified of him. Their repentance will be heightened by ſevere, but juſt recriminations on their race, for not having yielded ſooner to the miracles he wrought, his life, his death, and the ſpirit of his doctrine. Vain thought to fancy, that the adoption, and the covenants ſtill remained with them alone, after they had rejected him, who came in the name of the Lord to ſave. Mature reflections on theſe things, will degrade them to the duſt in their own eſtimation, and at the ſame time, inſpire them with adoring thoughts of him, who is the infinite Author of this inexpreſſibly happy alteration in their condition. May we not conceive

conceive, that the ſinner, in whoſe ſoul the life of God commenced but a ſhort time, prior to his being called off the earth, will in a peculiar manner be tranſported, when perhaps by a ſudden death, he finds himſelf in the aſſembly of the firſt-born, and among the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect. Such almoſt indeſcribable ſurprize, will animate the Jews, when they are emancipated from their preſent thraldom, and experience the unadulterated pleaſures of Chriſtianity. How will they exult in the light and life, derived from that Lord, on whoſe bleſſed head they had ſet a crown of thorns, and againſt whoſe unſpotted character, they had levelled every ſhaft of calumny and malice?—Now in ſincerity, they bend the knee, and inſtead of gall and vinegar, preſent him with broken hearts and contrite ſpirits. They not only unite, but burn with the warmeſt love to Chriſtians, whom but a little ago they deteſted, as the followers of an impoſtor; now fellow-labourers with them in that cauſe, when they mean to diſpute with them the palm of zeal, and unremitting obedience. Then the ſcattered Church, being united into one body, ſhall as one man, with one mind, give thanks to the one Supreme God through Chriſt, and ſay, O Lord, I will praiſe thee, becauſe the promiſe hath been ſure, and we at this moment feel, how rich the bleſſings are. The heart to do this cometh from God, who giveth grace to aſcribe all glory to

himſelf, and on every occaſion to ſpeak of his tender mercies with thankfulneſs.

Again we have the ſubject of their ſong, "thou waſt angry with me." Paſſions are aſcribed to the Almighty, only by ſpeaking after the manner of men. Anger, ſtrictly conſidered, is at leaſt a weakneſs, therefore cannot reſide with infinite perfection. God, we are told, is love, but he is likewiſe inflexible in juſtice, and of abſolute purity: hence ſprings the ſame neceſſity for his being diſpleaſed with ſinners, that there is for his delighting in the happineſs of his creatures: conſequently, his anger againſt any one, ſuppoſes him to have been a worker of iniquity. In the apprehenſion of the Jewiſh church, he had been angry with her, and he ſeems to be ſo, when he hides his face from his people; when he refuſes to hear their cries, when he afflicts them, and continues his hand upon them, letting in, a ſenſe of his diſpleaſure, upon their conſciences. In this reſpect, well might returning Iſrael own, that God had been angry with them; conſidering, what had befallen them at the deſtruction of their city; and ever ſince the time, when our Saviour had foretold it would come to paſs, that their enemies ſhould caſt a trench about them, and keep them in on every ſide; and ſhould lay Jeruſalem even with the ground, and its inhabitants, till the ſet time, when Jacob ſhall rejoice, and Iſrael ſhall ſing. They ſpeak here as one body of men,

becauſe

becauſe, there had been a national curſe inflicted upon them, and that this was removed, we learn from theſe words, thine anger is turned away, and thou comforteſt me.

This denotes his taking off his chaſtizing hand, and granting them the ſenſe of his pardoning love and mercy. It alſo imports, that the Jews, beſides being convinced of their impiety, ſhould be ſo drenched in ſorrow as would perfectly overwhelm them, did not the Almighty ſupport them with the conſolations of an amended and improving heart: aſſuring them, by his gracious ſpirit ſhedding abroad his love in their hearts, by the application of the promiſes, and ordinances of the Goſpel, being bleſſed to them; that their offences were cancelled, and they a land or church married to him, never more to be termed forſaken.

Is not this alſo the language of all, who are renewed in the ſpirit of their minds, whether Jew or Gentile?—ſeeing the foundation is the ſame, namely, the divine favour in an undeſerved manner beſtowed upon both, in conformity to that pious exclamation of the Apoſtle: Behold what manner of love the Father hath beſtowed, that we ſhould be called the ſons of God! All are by nature in a ſtate of alienation from God, and therefore, when he deigns to bring home the word of the kingdom, enlightening the ſoul in the knowledge of the truth, and efficaciouſly determining

mining it, to comply with the terms offered in the Goſpel; will not the ſoul own the juſtice of the divine diſpleaſure, while he rejoices, that through the perfect atonement of Chriſt, his anger is turned away, and that he enjoys the comforts of religion.

Verſe 2d. *Behold God is my ſalvation, I will truſt and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my ſtrength, and my ſong; he alſo is become my ſalvation.*

Here we ſee to whom Iſrael aſcribes this glorious change, even to him, who is wonderful in counſel, and excellent in working. Neither angels nor men effect this: God alone, is the contriver and accompliſher of my redemption, and his only be the praiſe. They with underſtanding now uſe the language of David, But thou haſt ſaved us from our enemies, and haſt put them to ſhame that hated us. In God we boaſt all the day long, and praiſe thy name for ever *. By ſalvation in this verſe, is certainly meant the knowledge of God in Chriſt, reconciling the world to himſelf; without which, if our lot is caſt under the Goſpel, our peace with our Maker can never be ſecured. It is ſomewhat ſingular, that the words themſelves are almoſt the ſame, with thoſe of the two moſt eminent ſaints mentioned in ſcripture. Thus ſpake Moſes, The Lord is my

* Pſ. xliv. 7, 8.

ſtrength

ſtrength and ſong, and he is become my ſalvation *. The occaſion was the wonderful paſſage through the Red Sea: which was a ſalvation to his people, that his own right arm wrought, without the concurrence of inferior agents, probably intimating, as hath been already hinted, that in ſome ſuch way, the Almighty will bring out Iſrael from ſpiritual Egypt, and convert them to Chriſtianity. And David, after being brought through the fire of affliction, declares, The Lord is my ſtrength and ſong, and is become my ſalvation †. Which if he is, he deſerves to be my confidence, therefore I will truſt in him, to prepare me for every ſtep in it, and for preſervation till I arrive at its perfection in the realms of glory. How ſimilar to theſe Old Teſtament ſaints, are the words of two eminent one's recorded in the New? And Mary ſaid, my ſoul doth magnify the Lord, and my ſpirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. He hath holpen his ſervant Iſrael, in remembrance of his mercy. Hear the exulting Zacharias, making the firſt uſe of his looſed tongue in proclaiming, Bleſſed be the Lord God of Iſrael, for he hath viſited and redeemed his people, and hath raiſed up a horn of ſalvation for us, in the houſe of his ſervant David.

This was the ground of the churches comfort, in the phraſe before us, uſhered in with a mark

* Exod. xv. 2. † Pſ. cxviii. 14.

of

of admiration, that the crucified Jeſus was her Saviour;—of attention, importing, the obligations ſhe was under to love and ſerve him:—and of direction to others, in queſt of ſubſtantial happineſs, pointing him out as the Lord only, in whom, any ſon or daughter of Adam could poſſeſs real and permanent felicity. The mental darkneſs of the Jews being done away, they begin to rejoice, and expreſs their confidence in God, as we perceive in theſe reviving terms. I will truſt, and not be afraid, as if they had ſaid,—I will be humbly confident, not preſumptuouſly arrogant, about my coming to ſalvation through Chriſt, and look upon my precious concerns as ſafe in his hands, joining the Apoſtle in affirming —I know in whom I have believed. How tranſporting will the Apoſtolic writings be to the deſcendants of Jacob, in that day, when they flock, like doves, to the windows of infinite mercy, in the ark Chriſt Jeſus? With what boldneſs will they alſo aſſert, that there is no condemnation to them that are in him? through whom they ſhall finally prevail over the world, ſin, and death. Such characters may well enjoy ſerenity of mind; nor dread with an unmanly fear, whatever dangers, or difficulties might threaten them. Aſſured of the divine protection, though, an hoſt of foes from without, or from within, encamp againſt them, they need not fear: though, let down into the dens of envious and malicious men, or ſteeped

in

in the moſt fiery troubles, they will no more fly to the hills for ſtrength, or truſt in the creature for preſervation; but firmly believe in the power and veracity of him who hath promiſed to ſupport them. The Jews having been long ruled over by tyrannical maſters, and under a bondage, ſtill more dreadful in its conſequences, to their own luſts and infidelity, gives them the higher reliſh for religious liberty, and inflames the rapture of this heavenly ſong, conſidering their ſolid foundation for ſuch tranſports.

For the Lord Jehovah is my ſtrength and my ſong!—theſe two glorious epithets but ſeldom occur in Scripture; owing to which, with other collateral reaſons, they by learned men, are referred to the ſecond perſon of the Trinity. Whether the interpretation be perfectly juſt, let critics determine; or thoſe employ their time, who apprehend diſcuſſions on the Trinity to be uſeful. That the explication, is pious,—all the believers in a Redeemer will allow; for if he be our ſalvation, he muſt neceſſarily be our ſtrength and ſong; the ſtrength of the Churches ſpiritual life, including her graces and her duties, by which ſhe exerciſed the one, and performed the other. It is the Lord, according to the Apoſtle, who works in us, both to will and to do, and who ſtrengthens us with all might, by his ſpirit in the inner man. In this vale of tears, we muſt expect to meet with the ſources of theſe, even grief and tribulation: but of our Heavenly

Heavenly Protector it is ſaid:—He giveth ſongs in the night, the ſubject of which will be various, according to the caſe and character of the reſpective members of the Jewiſh, then become the Chriſtian Church; yet all centering in adoration of the perſon of the Redeemer, the righteouſneſs effected by his active and paſſive obedience; and in a proper uſe of the numerous privileges, which through him they have, or live in expectation of.

"He alſo is become my ſalvation." Though this looks like a repetition of the firſt clauſe; may we not, to free it in ſome meaſure from that charge, ſuppoſe; that granting in him we live, move, and have our being, we are all by no means properly impreſſed with the fact, only when by ſuperior motives, awakened to a ſenſe of it, at which period we confeſs with the Church, that from clearer manifeſtations of himſelf, he is now, to the real comfort of our ſouls, become our friend, and our beloved.

To carry on the alluſion to the Chriſtian, in every period theſe words are unqueſtionably his. When he reflects on the awful, and yielding precipice whereon he naturally ſtood:—his ignorance of ſpiritual matters, with the power which evil habits had over him: his burſting heart on being brought back from the dangerous paths, his feet had trod, feels language inadequate to tell, what he owes for reſtoration to the Divine Favour,—is for a while mute with aſtoniſhment at the great-

neſs of the work, and condeſcenſion of the agent: —ere he exclaims,—that of a truth God is his ſalvation. He perceives the labyrinth wherein he was held to have been ſo intricate; and the debility of his own powers ſo glaring, that only infinite mercy could have brought him into the liberty of the ſons of God. Sincerely does he proclaim, that the Lord is his ſtrength and ſong, whom he believes to be unchangeable in his purpoſes of goodneſs to his creatures; therefore on him he will truſt, and not be afraid: reſting perſuaded with holy Paul, That neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things preſent, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, ſhall be able to ſeparate us from the love of God, which is Chriſt Jeſus our Lord *.

Verſe 3d. *Therefore with joy, ſhall ye draw water out of the wells of ſalvation.*

The Targum is, "And ye ſhall receive a new "doctrine from the choſen, the righteous:" which is true of the doctrine of the Goſpel received by the hands of choſen men, the Apoſtles of Chriſt. The Jews alledge, this paſſage reſpects that ſolemn rite uſed in the feaſt of tabernacles, when in the night-time, with great variety of muſick, and of mirth, they brought water in a golden veſſel, from the ſpring of Siloam, to the temple, and there

* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

poured

poured it upon the altar. Some verſions render the words in the imperative:—Draw ye, whereby the Church exhorts others to follow her example; nor can the idea be blamed, ſeeing all who love the Lord, delight in bringing others near him. At any rate in this verſe, we have the benefits ſpecified, that would accrue to them from this bliſsful reſtoration, with the improvement they would make of it. By water we are to underſtand Divine grace, which would then abound towards them. As it is Iſrael, of whom the Prophet literally ſpeaks, he perhaps, alludes to thoſe former periods, when their anceſtors were in great diſtreſs for want of water: and were bountifully, though miraculouſly ſupplied from a rock. Or, to the well out of which God promiſed to give them water; while they abode about the confines of Moab, and from whence they drew it with exceeding great joy, expreſſed in ſongs and ditties, compoſed on the occaſion. And indeed, nothing leſs than the exertions of the power, which ſmote the rock, can enable them to draw from the wells of ſalvation.

Water is an element neceſſary to man, and every part of nature. Without it, the face of the univerſe would be uniform,—a dry parched heath:—no ſpring in its beauty, nor harveſt with its fruits to fill the granary, rendering jocund hill and dale. It is this teeming from Nature's alembic, which gives bluſhing to the roſe, as well as aromatic perfume,

ſume, which enables the lily to rear its head, each flower to diſcloſe its ſweets, and each bud its bloſſoms. Hence grace is often in the pages of inſpiration repreſented by water, the one being as eſſential to the ſpiritual life, as the other is to the natural. As ſoon will the tree, deprived of its proper nutriment, ſend its towering branches to the ſkies, as the ſoul advance one ſtep in holineſs, without drawing water from theſe wells of ſalvation.

By wells of ſalvation, ſome ſimply underſtand, Iſrael's being brought to embrace the Chriſtian faith, walking in the light thereof, and ſo improving all the bleſſings of the Goſpel, as to grow up to the ſtature of perfect men in Chriſt Jeſus. While others underſtand thereby, the promiſes of God revealed, ratified, and bequeathed to us in Divine Revelation. Neither of theſe contradict the other, they only differ a little in the expreſſion. We are told the returning Jews will do this with joy:—that is, with the moſt exulting ſatisfaction, will they appropriate the bleſſings purchaſed for them; and inſtead of languiſhing in ſleepy indolence, like many, who have been long in full and free poſſeſſion of them, they will be active and eager, in the regulation of their lives by the laws of the Goſpel, and the example of Chriſt, in order to acquire that heavenly temper, which ſhall make them meet to be partakers, of the inheritance of the ſaints in light.

How coincident is the Chriſtian character with the contents of this verſe? After having recourſe, through ſupernatural aid, to the covenant of grace ratified in a Redeemer's blood, will they not live the life of faith?—attend to his ordinances, theſe wells of ſalvation, as far as they are bleſſed; and, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, with joy crop the never-fading laurels, ſpringing from the croſs of Jeſus. Seeing it hath pleaſed the Father, that in him all fulneſs ſhould dwell, they will thence draw every needful ſupply; get rid of every burden, and be fitted to go on in their way rejoicing, to the heavenly Jeruſalem. Remember the well is deep, and without faith, which is the gift of God, they cannot draw. Enriched with this, they draw freely, for this fountain of gardens, and well of living, water ſtands open night and day. The more they drink, the greater is their reliſh for the ſtream, which refreſhes the ſoul with every joy, and thoroughly cleanſes from every ſtain. It is the will of God, that all who have the true knowledge of him ſhould rejoice in him, and before him; that we ſhould enter his gates with praiſe, and keep our ſolemn feaſts with gladneſs of heart.

Verſe 4th. *And in that day ſhall ye ſay; Praiſe the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention, that his name is exalted.*

In the preceding verſes, the Prophet chiefly had in view, the perſonal conduct of the Jews, that is their

their diſpoſition on being admitted into the glorious privileges of the Goſpel. Whereas in this, and the following verſes, he ſeems to deſcribe, what this would prompt them to attempt with regard to others. Nothing ſo much extends, and exerciſes, the benevolent feelings of the heart as Religion. Equally certain is it, that the perſon who practically knows the ſweets of genuine piety, deſires to communicate a reliſh thereof to others; from a conviction of its happy tendency. Thus when Anti-chriſt ſhall be deſtroyed, and the kingdom of Chriſt enlarged, by the addition of the Jews; the Church will be in a glorious condition, her walls will be ſalvation, and her gates praiſe. The members will be emulating each other in the alacrity of their ſervices, and while they adore the Supreme Being for diſtinguiſhed favours to communities, they will endeavour to excite others around them, to the ſame pleaſing taſk, begging of them in the bowels of tendereſt friendſhip, to praiſe the Lord on account of his divine perfections: eſpecially as diſplayed in the ſpiritual bleſſings conferred on them, which thanks they rightly conceive to be beſt expreſſed, by giving him the glory of them. Hear, what the heavenly voices cry on this joyful event!—The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Chriſt, and he ſhall reign for ever and ever. And the four-and-twenty elders, which ſat before God on their ſeats, fell upon their faces, and wor-

ſhipped God, ſaying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and waſt, and art to come, becauſe thou haſt taken to thee thy great power, and haſt reigned *.

"Call upon his name." This takes in the whole of religious worſhip, every part of which properly begins with the invocation thereof, and terminates in aſcribing praiſe, honour, and glory thereunto. Prayer is peculiarly implied,—the darling exerciſe of every truly good man, and which, from all ſuch, is as ointment poured forth. It hath been ſaid:—As giving thanks for former mercies, is a decent way of begging further mercy: ſo the begging further mercy, is accepted by the Almighty, as an acknowledgment of thoſe already received.

"Declare his doings among the people." Not merely his works of creation, which we are not more enabled to behold, than we are expreſsly enjoined to magnify; but his works of providence and of redemption: not forgetting the ſingular courſes he was pleaſed to purſue in our preſervation and amendment. To confine it to his acts of grace, ſome have choſe to read—his counſels. Be this as it will,—Cry aloud, and ſpare not; let the heathens hear, that they thus invited, may court communion with the God of Iſrael. To which is ſubjoined, "Make mention that his name is ex-

* Rev. xi. 15, 16, 17.

alted,

alted;" by ſome rendered celebrate his name, for it is exalted. Either the name given him by his Heavenly Father above every name; which Jews will then be made to know: or that he hath done excellent things for his people, and now clearly is the Great and Holy One in the midſt of them, manifeſting his glorious offices among them, and appearing on every emergency in their behalf.

Need we point out how deſcriptive this is of the character of Chriſtians? Was there ever any that loved the Lord Jeſus in ſincerity? who did not earneſtly pray, that all were as they are, their ſins and imperfections excepted, and according to their ſituation in life, labour to animate the breaſts of their fellow-creatures, with glowing affection to an exalted Redeemer, and rapturous zeal in his cauſe. With the woman of Samaria, they not only cry,—Come ſee a man who hath told me all I ever did! but,—Come ſee the Saviour, who hath forgiven all I have actually done: Is not this the Chriſt? Merits he not your moſt implicit confidence and higheſt praiſe?

Verſe 5th. *Sing unto the Lord, for he hath done excellent things, this is known in all the earth.*

Can any work be more excellent, than planting the kingdom of his grace in the hearts of his deepeſt foes, and moſt inveterate enemies? Surely none. On that day therefore, when the freedom and richneſs of this, ſhall be ſo illuſtriouſly diſplayed in the ſalvation of Iſrael, will any breaſt refuſe to

aid the ſwelling anthem to his praiſe? Let young and old unite to ſing how good and great he is—for after all their efforts, it will take eternal ages to tell the ſalvation he hath wrought; the righteouſneſs which the Saviour has brought in; perfect in its kind, and everlaſting in its duration. He hath offered up a ſacrifice, that excells all other ſacrifices, that ever were offered up under the law, or could be preſented by angels or men. Sing how he triumphed over ſin and death, and ſecured an immortal crown for his every faithful follower. Let theſe with all the circumſtances pertaining to himſelf,—to his Goſpel—and his Church, whether here or above, be publiſhed to all the world. This I think comes nearer to the import of the phraſe, for this is known in all the earth: than the idea of thoſe, who imagine, it ſimply intimates; that the Jews when reſtored will not be a ſmall ſociety, and that the event will make a noiſe among mankind.

The ſouls of Chriſtians emancipated from the love and dominion of ſin, through Divine Grace, are not ſlack in commemorating the living example, and dying love of Chriſt. Like him of old, to whom ſight was reſtored, they fly to every corner, and embrace every opportunity of lauding Jehovah's name, who hath effected the wondrous change in them. The very babes and ſucklings of the ſpiritual family cry,—Hoſannah in the higheſt——Salvation let the echo fly, from the ſcorched wanderer

derer on Afric's ſultry plains, to the frozen Laplander of the North; let it be heard by every nation, from the riſing to the ſetting ſun.

Verſe 6th. *Cry out, and ſhout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Iſrael in the midſt of thee.*

The Goſpel Church is Zion; Chriſt is Zion's King. Thoſe are inhabitants there, who believe, and by their virtuous lives, adorn the doctrines of Chriſtianity, and ſuch will make it their daily ſtudy, to diffuſe the knowledge of the truth, and be inſtrumental in turning many from darkneſs to light. There health is enjoyed—proviſions are in plenty with the utmoſt ſafety and protection. No weapon formed againſt the weakeſt, in that choſen place ſhall proſper; for the Lord God is their ſun and ſhield, he hath given grace, and he will conduct to glory. Have they not then reaſon to cry out and ſhout, becauſe of the greatneſs of their King, the High Prieſt over the houſhold of God; who is in the midſt of her, ſhe ſhall not be moved; who helpeth her, and that right early! In ſuch immunities, and bleſſed with ſuch privileges, the Church at this period ſtands; as verifies the worldly-minded Balaam's words,—He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he ſeen perverſeneſs in Iſrael, the Lord his God is with him, and the ſhout of a King is among them *.

* Numb. xxiii. 21.

In like manner under the Goſpel, thoſe who have imbibed its genuine ſpirit, cry to the weary, —laden with guilt and woes: Come and drink unmingled felicity at the fountain-head. Are ye weak?—Are ye tried, forſaken by your familiar acquaintance, and injured by the world? Are ye vexed on every ſide? and embarraſſed beyond even the hopes of being extricated? Yet if the Holy One of Iſrael is thy Saviour, yield not to fear, but cry aloud, and tell an unbelieving world, thy preſent peace and future hopes.

From the hiſtory of the Jews we may learn the folly of truſting to external privileges, however many or great, in the work of our ſalvation: unleſs accompanied with a principle of ſpiritual life in the ſoul. Can we under the Goſpel ſufficiently expreſs our thankfulneſs to God? in that his tender mercies ſtill overſhadow us, though we have all of us been too much partakers of their ſins. Both in their caſe and in our own, it appears, that the mercy of the Supreme Being, like his nature, is without limits. That this endearing attribute ſhould be over all his other works, is amazing condeſcenſion: yet had it not been ſo, could it have paſſed over the iniquity, obſtinacy, and malice of the Jewiſh race? who contrary to the plaineſt evidence, rejected Heaven's unſpeakable gift to man. This inſtance of infinite goodneſs, ſhall be matter of admiration to all eternity.

Here

Here is encouragement for the vileſt offender; provided he truly repent and truſt in the mighty Saviour's name; that ſuch a ſong as we have been conſidering, may yet be put in his mouth, and his unhallowed lips taught to magnify the rock of ages, who, by the imputation of a Redeemer's righteouſneſs, can ſet him free, and make him clean. Nor is his power inadequate to the taſk, for when he reſolves to be the governor in the midſt of them, nothing can reſiſt his arm, neither the powers of darkneſs, nor thoſe luſts which cleave faſteſt to the ſoul. Hence let us draw comfort in our ſpiritual warfare, and from a view of the Divine dealings, whether with ourſelves or others, join the Apoſtle, when he cries out:—O the depth of the riches both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his judgments, and his ways paſt finding out!—To whom be eternal honour. Amen, and Amen.

EXPO-

EXPOSITION V.

From MATTH. XIII. Ver. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the ſower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and underſtandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was ſown in his heart: this is he which received ſeed by the way-ſide. But he that received the ſeed into ſtony places, the ſame is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: Yet hath he not root in himſelf, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the word, by and by he is offended. He alſo that receiveth ſeed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word: and the care of this world, and the deceitfulneſs of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that receiveth ſeed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word, and underſtandeth *it*, which alſo beareth fruit, and bringeth forth ſome an hundred-fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty.

THE method of inſtruction in the ſeveral periods of ſociety, like all other human affairs, hath undergone various changes. Almoſt every nation hath had ſomething peculiar, in the

manner they adopted, for the communication of knowledge. Whether theſe peculiarities are in themſelves wholly arbitrary, we ſhall not determine. But only obſerve in general, what we preſume none will deny, that there are ſome modes of inſtruction better adapted than others, to command attention, and to gain the end. Of this kind, we venture to reckon the parabolic way of teaching, which has been highly eſteemed in every civilized country, and for the moſt part agreeable, not only to the lower ranks of mankind, but even to thoſe of the correcteſt taſte, and moſt refined education. A parable may be defined thus—any juſt ſimilitude, or apt figure, whereby truth of any kind, or moral inſtructions in particular, are conveyed or enforced. In religion, it is the uſing natural things by way of compariſon, to impreſs thoſe that are ſpiritual, the better on our underſtanding. It is not neceſſary, that all the actions of men mentioned in them, be morally honeſt. The unjuſt Steward is only ſpoke of by our Bleſſed Lord, to ſhew his care in providing for the time to come.

To underſtand and explain parables aright, we muſt attentively conſider the main deſign of them, and to diſtinguiſh with accuracy, the ſecondary, or ſubordinate ends. Then it behoves us to examine, whence it is taken, and how far every thing in it, tends to the general, or particular end. Nothing ſave what is ſtrictly ſpeaking connected herewith, ſhould be uſed in the explanation, though

though in the application, a greater latitude may be profitably taken.

With regard to this allegorical method of conveying knowledge, we can only with certainty ſay, that the parable of Jotham mentioned in the 9th chapter of Judges and 7th verſe, is the firſt we meet with. Yet this is not ſufficient reaſon, for attributing the invention of parables to the Jews: ſeeing at this diſtance of time and place; we cannot preciſely tell, how far they copied it, from thoſe they knew, or were connected with.

If any thing of that nature had been the caſe, would it not appear from the writings of Moſes? Not being ſo much as once uſed by him; is a convincing proof, that it was then only in its infant ſtate. For that other nations, were ſomewhat acquainted with it in his time, ſeveral writers have inferred from his own words*, where he ſpeaks of thoſe, who recorded the overthrow of Sihon King of the Amorites, and of his metropolis Proverbs. And in the 23d of the ſame book, at the 7th verſe, he expreſsly ſays of the raſh and worldly Balaam, that he took up his parable and ſaid.

Even in the time when learning flouriſhed moſt among the Greeks, the mode of inſtructing by parables, never reached however, that degree of perfection, it did among the Jews. To ſupport

* Numb. xxi. 27.

which aſſertion, the parable of Nathan to David may be appealed to, with as much propriety and truth, as the third verſe of the firſt chapter of Geneſis, is, by that ableſt critic Longinus, held out as a ſpecimen of the true Sublime. Thereby, the wiſe prophet, naturally brought the penetrating monarch, to pronounce a heavy though juſt ſentence, againſt himſelf, for a crime, which it might have been dangerous, to have hinted at, in any other way. Nor was it uſed by prophets only, or for religious and moral purpoſes; ſince we find that popular ſtateſman, and fortunate general Joab, applies it to the compaſſing his own ends, by the inſinuating ſpeech, he put in the woman of Tekoah's mouth, that artful inſtrument of his politics, which we have recorded in the 14th chapter of 2d Samuel, from the beginning to the 21ſt verſe.

The advantages attending this way of conveying truth, need ſcarce be pointed out. None will deny it to be gentle, eaſy, and pleaſant; owing to which conſiderations, perhaps it hath been ſo often profitable. Senſible objects may very properly be viewed, as images of ſpiritual and inviſible things, and by this uſe of them, we are aſſiſted in our conceptions and reaſonings, about matters of which, we ſhould otherwiſe, have ſcarce any idea at all. By ſubſtituting one perſon in the room of another, or by relating a ſtory oppoſite to our purpoſe, we are enabled to place certain

certain characters and actions in a ſtriking point of light, and to treat them with a freedom, which in a plain direct addreſs would ſcarcely be reconcilable with prudence and delicacy. For the information and amendment of mankind, the Almighty had uſed ſimilitudes by the prophets. Now he tries their effects in the hands of his only-begotten ſon,—another motive might be, to fulfill the prophecy. See verſes 34 and 35 of this chapter, where our Expoſition lies. All theſe things ſpake Jeſus unto the multitudes in parables; and without a parable, ſpake he not unto them. That it might be fulfilled, which was ſpoken by the prophet, ſaying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept ſecret from the foundation of the world. This clearly alludes to an exordium of holy Aſaph's in the 78th Pſalm. Beſides the conſideration, that it rendered his diſcourſes more agreable, and intereſting to a people, accuſtomed to this manner of ſpeaking: it enabled him to throw a veil over ſome things, which it was not fit to declare in expreſs terms. Many events were to take place, ſaith an amiable divine, which in the ordinary courſe of things would have been obſtructed, had our Lord openly and plainly foretold them; ſuch as his being put to death by the Jews; the deſtruction of their polity and worſhip; and the ſpreading of the Goſpel among the Gentiles. His candour will excuſe, our rather concluding

cluding, that, had they been ever ſo expreſsly declared, nothing could have prevented their happening. Much more cordially do we aſſent to his remark, relative to the doctrines of Chriſtianity, viz., that the full explanation of them, being reſerved for wiſe purpoſes to the preaching of the Apoſtles; this parabolical mode of inſtruction, was the fitteſt to convey that degree of light concerning them, which was judged moſt proper, during the term of our Saviour's own perſonal miniſtry. Hence he tells his diſciples a little before his laſt ſufferings, Theſe things have I ſpoken unto you in proverbs, the time cometh, when I ſhall no more ſpeak unto you in proverbs, but I ſhall ſhew you plainly of the Father.

If we look back to the beginning of this chapter, we are told, the ſame day Jeſus went out of the houſe, where he had been teaching and working miracles. The reaſon of his leaving the houſe was; either to converſe with his mother and brethren as they deſired: or to withdraw himſelf from company, and take ſome refreſhment by the ſea-ſide: or becauſe it would not hold the people, and therefore he quitted it for a more convenient place. The time he went out of it, was the ſame day, he had caſt the devil out of the man blind and dumb, and had delivered himſelf ſo freely concerning the Scribes and Phariſees, who had blaſphemouſly aſcribed that miracle, to the aſſiſtance of the devil. He ſat for a while by the ſea-ſide,

which

which hath three names in ſcripture, the ſea of Galilee,—of Tiberias, from a town that ſtood on one ſide of it,—and the lake of Genezareth. Then great multitudes were ſoon gathered about him, whoſe motives for ſo doing, no doubt were various as their ſentiments, characters, or inclinations. Some wiſhing to ſee more miracles,—ſome his perſon,—ſome for the loaves and fiſhes,—ſome to hear him preach,—many to be cured of their bodily diſeaſes,—and here and there, a ſtraggling individual, to reap ſolid inſtruction, and be eſtabliſhed in the truth. He went into a ſhip, or open boat, that he might not be too much crouded; not ſo much from the inconvenience of this circumſtance to himſelf, as that it would exclude the audience from ſeeing him, and hearing ſo diſtinctly, as he intended they ſhould.

The chapter contains an account of ſeven parables, four delivered in the ſituation deſcribed, to the people, and three afterwards to his diſciples, when apart by themſelves. All which taken compleatly, are ſtrictly doctrinal;—deſcriptive of himſelf;—his diſciples;—his audience;—Chriſtians in general;—the effects of the Goſpel;—and the future ſtate of mankind, as ſimilar to that of thoſe, who lived in the particular period, when theſe were uttered. Examine their ſeveral tendencies, and this will be evident. The one now read, is the firſt narrated, at the cloſe of which, we find an awakening ſummons given, to rouze the at-

tention of the audience: Who hath ears to hear, let him hear: which Luke introducing, hath rendered ſtill more emphatical, by prefixing; And when he had ſaid theſe things, he cried with a louder tone of voice than before, with a view of impreſſing the importance of the admonition, from his own ardour in the delivery of it. From the ſmall, but uſeful variation of the three Evangeliſts in ſtating it; we learn how fully and freely, the bleſſings of ſalvation are held forth in the lively oracles of divine truth; provided, we have ſpiritual diſcernment to diſtinguiſh them. Next we are admoniſhed, about what, or whom we hear. Not the ſallies of genius, or airy ſpeculations, which nothing profit the immortal ſoul:—or men in peculiar ſtations, and inveſted with ſpecial authority:—but the unſearchable riches of the Goſpel of Chriſt; and the teachings of the Comforter, that only infallible Spirit, who takes of the things of God, and ſheweth them unto all the upright in heart. Then we are to take heed how we hear, —guarding againſt thoſe things, that will hinder our profiting, ſuch as careleſſneſs in the act itſelf: —prejudices at the truth:—or liſtleſſneſs, in keeping alive, upon the imaginations of our hearts, what we may have heard, and in ſome meaſure felt.

After this, we have a very intereſting queſtion put to our Lord by the diſciples: Why ſpeakeſt thou unto them in parables? Though the chief reaſon

reaſon of this query ſeems to be, the regard they had for the real intereſt of the liſtening throng; yet their own ignorance, or if that charge is deemed too much, their feeble and confuſed conceptions of it, may be juſtly reckoned another. Our Saviour's reply is contained from the 11th to the 17th verſe, informing them, that by the method of inſtruction which he purſued; things belonging to the kingdom of Heaven and its righteouſneſs, were rendered plain to minds diſpoſed to embrace the truth; and more obſcure to thoſe, who were perverſely ignorant. For inſtance, the Jews in his days were ſo averſe to divine knowledge, and had thrown ſuch contempt on the means of grace, as induced the Almighty, in his judgments, to give them up to blindneſs of mind. There is a ſpeculative knowledge of heavenly things, which will not avail in the great day of accounts; and there is an experimental, or practical knowledge, which reacheth the heart, guides the life, and often dwells in poor, though honeſt minds:—this will prove more acceptable than holocauſts, and through the Saviour's merits, pave the way to eternal glory. To you, ſays our bleſſed Redeemer, meaning his real diſciples, it is given, to know the myſteries of the Goſpel diſpenſation; whereas to them who impartially weigh not the evidences of its divinity, it is not given. Hereby intimating, with reſpect to his preſent audience, that the major part of them,

whoſe beſt motive perhaps was curioſity; who put themſelves to no trouble, to examine the nature, and tendency of thoſe objects, propoſed to their underſtanding, and were at no pains to have difficulties explained or removed, would depart, neither wiſer nor better than they came. In one ſenſe, they attained as much as they in fact coveted; viz. a gratification of the eye and the ear; without improving in the leaſt what they heard; therefore ſpiritually it is ſaid of them. In hearing they hear not, and in ſeeing they ſee not. For whoſoever deſpiſeth the knowledge of the Goſpel; in its ſpiritual efficacy, find ultimately, its precious truths to have been a ſealed book unto them; notwithſtanding the exalted and pleaſing ideas they entertained of their own wiſdom, and ſuperior penetration in unfolding its myſteries. Whereas his faithful followers ſhould in a full and explicit manner, be qualified, to know the things pertaining to godlineſs, and every intellectual improvement, by believing on him the Redeemer of mankind. Unto you it is given to know, the myſteries of the kingdom of Heaven: and from our Lord's ſpeaking ſo often even to them in parables, we perceive the propriety of our being induſtrious in the ſtudy of ſacred things; and likewiſe the great need, we have of divine aid, to help us to underſtand ſacred things. Were we ever ſo famous for either natural or acquired abilities, ſtill like the Scribes and Phariſees, we may

may be but novices in the right knowledge of them; compared to the moſt ignorant and illiterate, aſſiſted by the Holy Spirit. For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the ſpirit of a man that is in him, ſo the things of God, knoweth no man, but the ſpirit of God.

The 12th verſe, whatever difficulties ſome apprehend they ſee in it, appears plainly to import the following truth. To him that hath the knowledge of ſpiritual things, who prompted by higher views, or nobler motives than curioſity, cordially embraces me as the captain of his ſalvation, ſhall be given greater degrees of light, grace, and experience; and he ſhall have in greater abundance of permanent joys, both here and hereafter. Whereas from him of a contrary character, ſhall be taken away the external means, or the flimſy pretences, which he may have miſapplied, or vaunted of.

The 13th, 14th, and 15th verſes are copied from the prophecy of Iſaiah vi. 9, 10, verſes: and what is rather ſingular, occur ſix times in the New Teſtament, though with ſome ſmall variation. Few places of ſcripture have more perplexed real Chriſtians than this, which circumſtance we truſt, ſhall be ſuſtained as a ſufficient apology, for our digreſſing a little, in order to explain it. The ways, Commentators have choſen to do this, are extremely different. Without canvaſſing their ſeveral merits, permit us to ſet out with re-

marking, the vaſt impropriety of our tranſlation, in which the quotation, if it be one, ſtands in the Goſpel according to Mark iv. 11. which introduces our Saviour ſaying, that he ſpake to the people in parables, "that ſeeing, they might not perceive; and hearing they might not underſtand, leſt they ſhould be converted, and be ſaved. Now, according to the general acceptation of the words in this place, and in the prophecy whence they are taken, the Almighty Sovereign of the world, ſeems pointed out, as the cauſe of this deplorable ſituation in the people;—in other words renders them objects of our pity, while it morally exculpates them from guilt; but far be it from the Creator, that he ſhould pervert juſtice, or from a God of unbounded goodneſs, that he ſhould deal, much leſs delight in cruelty. Was ever his power exerted in creation, with a view to the final deſtruction of the creature. Surely no. Admitting, the literal meaning of the words, as they there ſtand; would they not fill us with unjuſt, and unbecoming notions of the moſt attractive perfections of the Deity? and of the tender mercies, and pure benevolence of that Gracious Redeemer, who weeped over their ſtupidity, and ſo often lamented the hardneſs of Jewiſh hearts.

The miſtake is partly owing to that verſion of the Old Teſtament, quoted by the writers of the New, where theſe words are tranſlated in an active ſenſe, which in the original imply only a bare

bare permiſſion; in which view, our Lord, and the Apoſtles underſtood them, as may be learnt from that petition in the beſt of prayers:—Lead us not into temptation, and that expoſition of it by St. James; Let no man ſay, that he is tempted of God, for God tempteth no man. Hence we infer, it ſhould be rendered, as we have it in the Goſpel according to Matthew. Becauſe ſeeing, they do not ſee, and hearing, they do not underſtand;—That is in ſpite of the plaineſt preaching;—the greateſt miracles;—the fulleſt evidence;—the ſureſt teſtimony, and obvious connection with prophecy: they purpoſely, and from the moſt inveterate malice to me, and prejudices againſt my pure, ſpiritual, and perfect doctrines, reject the meſſage of grace and mercy directed to them: it is but juſt to lock up from them, that, which they have ſo contumeliouſly ſpurned. In their own vanity and righteouſneſs, they ſit ſecure under the word and rod of God; and ſcornful as Jeſhurun, that waxed fat and wicked. They are like the deaf adder, that ſtoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming ever ſo wiſely. The eyes of their underſtanding have they alſo cloſed, upon the beams of the Sun of righteouſneſs; becauſe internally they prefer darkneſs to light. The ſaddeſt condition of a human being on this ſide the grave, is, to ſit under the ordinances of God, enjoying many ſpecial privileges; yet all with an untouched

heart, and ſeared conſcience. The above interpretation is confirmed, from the obvious meaning, of the ſame word, in other places of ſcripture; as in 1 Sam. ii. 25. where the ſame particle in the original is tranſlated becauſe, inſtead of wherefore, it being there ſaid, that Eli's ſons hearkened not unto the voice of their Father, becauſe the Lord would ſlay them; for it would be highly injurious to the character of the kind Parent of nature, to ſuppoſe, that he forced them to diſobedience in order to deſtroy them for it. By this eaſy, and we hope natural ſolution, does not the imagined difficulty vaniſh? and the more practical meaning become conſpicuous. God had not ſo dealt with any other nation; and few nevertheleſs either ſo highly offended, or were greater ſtrangers to inward purity and holineſs. Their hearts were waxed groſs; wherefore the miniſtry of the word, became to them the ſavour of death unto death, and they under it, like clay under the influence of the ſun, grew harder and harder. Having thus rejected the counſel of God, againſt themſelves, and ſo dreadfully provoked the Infinite Majeſty of Heaven: He ſays, Let them alone, My ſpirit ſhall no more ſtrive with them. They have had line upon line, precept upon precept, they have heard my forerunner's exhortation in vain, and my own doctrines, with the moſt fixed averſion, on which account, all that the Prophet uttered concerning them ſhall be fulfilled.

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A very judicious divine, in explaining the paſſage hath ſaid, that the words as they are found in the Goſpel, according to Mark, are no quotation; nor the ſame with thoſe found in Matthew, but that they contain an additional ſentiment on the ſame ſubject, by way of farther illuſtration. Into the merits of this obſervation we ſhall not enter; but, having attempted to clear the difficulties in the preceding part of this chapter; ſhall now proceed to the conſideration of the parable itſelf; which is that of the ſower and the ſeed; whereby, our Lord intends their underſtanding rightly, the different ſucceſs, wherewith his own preaching, and theirs in future periods, ſhould be attended.

Verſe 18th. *Hear ye therefore the parable of the ſower.*

Though it is not till after the delivery of many other parables, that we find the multitude diſmiſſed in the 36th verſe, yet from the context upon the whole, and the nature of the diſcourſe in general; it ſeems reaſonable enough to conclude, that the addreſs was made to the diſciples alone; who at this time were in the ſhip with him, from whence, being truly in the roſtrum, he taught the wondering croud. Some have thought, that it happened immediately after delivering the parable, as the queſtion which gave riſe to it, was founded on the concluding words thereof, and that in addreſſing Jeſus; the diſciples ſpake in ſuch a tone of voice, as they uſed in

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converſation, and that our bleſſed Redeemer replied in the ſame key; ſo that the people on the ſhore not hearing diſtinctly what paſſed; Mark might with propriety ſay, they were alone; as no doubt they judged themſelves, when remote from others, they formed that heavenly, and holy ſociety, of which the only begotten Son of God was chief. Or perhaps to give the audience time to digeſt, and ponder well what they had heard, he might order the diſciples to go a little farther from land: well knowing that hearing, without careful meditating, is of little effect; and that what can in any reſpect influence our life and converſation, muſt be duly weighed in the ſcales of ſound judgment, and deeply rooted in the heart. One chief deſign in ſpeaking the parable was, to convince every one, that ſimply hearing the word of God, was inſufficient for the purpoſe of ſalvation; ſeeing many hear it, who are never converted or amended by it. It might alſo be intended to ſhew; that few comparatively are judicious hearers of the word of God; as that of four ſorts in all, three were bad. Not more eaſe, or greater induſtry is requiſite to prepare the ground, previous to ſowing ſeed; than we muſt give to the cultivation of our minds, in order to grow in the habits of all virtue. This neglect of the preparatives, is the ſole cauſe, why we find ſo many affected hearers, who, are manifeſtly indolent performers. But of this more will be ſaid hereafter.

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The Evangeliſt Mark ſeems to hint, that our Lord gently upbraided them for their ſlowneſs of comprehenſion; by introducing him, ſaying with a kind of emphaſis, denoting ſurprize;—Know ye not the parable? Conſidering all your opportunities of improvement, and the ſingular nature of the Divine favours towards you;—Are ye ſtill ſo dull? Cannot ye perceive the ſcope and tendency of truths, veiled under images ſo commonly underſtood? How then will ye know all parables? If here you ſtumble, what will become of you in more rugged paths, when you ſhall be put to trials far more ſevere? yet commanded to go forth, proclaiming my Goſpel to every creature. If ſo ſimple a matter puzzles you; what will you feel in receiving or expounding, the more myſterious parts of my religion? In the mean time however, as I am yet with you, there is no occaſion for you to be at any loſs; therefore attend to the explication, of what you have already heard.

Verſe 19th. *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and underſtandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away, that which was ſown in his heart, this is he, which received ſeed by the way-ſide.*

The figures here uſed are ſufficiently obvious. Under the character of the ſower, our Saviour is repreſented, and all who properly qualified, and regularly called, are with integrity of purpoſe, exerciſed, in teaching ſpiritual truths. The decorum

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and ſolemnity uſed by the Apoſtles, in filling up the vacancy made by the apoſtacy of Judas, hath been often urged againſt thoſe, who are ſelf-created preachers, or ſowers of the word of God. To argue, becauſe the Apoſtles originally were poor illiterate fiſhermen; that therefore in ſpite of genius, and without all human learning, any man may preach that pleaſes, with as much right and equal uſefulneſs, is inconſiſtent with common ſenſe, much more with the dictates of Revelation. However many the advantages, which the Diſciples derived from the converſation of their Lord; yet we find them arraigned for their want of faith again and again. Ere they ſet out as preachers of the Goſpel, they were divinely inſpired; and previous to our Lord's ſending out the ſeventy Diſciples, he qualified them for the buſineſs, on which they were ſent. Is there no difference to be made between common graces and extraordinary gifts?—No diſtinction between a pious Chriſtian, and a man endued with the ſpirit of ſacred inſpiration? Surely there is. Then all reaſoning drawn by way of precedent, from the caſe of the Apoſtles, to ignorant and unlearned men, in the latter periods of Chriſtianity, is totally inconcluſive. On this ground, many worthy characters have denied that a perſon however honeſt, and well meaning a Chriſtian, hath the leaſt right to aſſume the office of a public teacher of the Goſpel. Among pagans, as well as thoſe favoured with Revelation, the

the holy duties of religious worſhip, have ever been a chief concern. The performance of its rites, among barbarians, may in many caſes have been ridiculous, ſtill have been under certain reſtraints, and confined to a peculiar ſet of men, choſen, or entitled to that office for particular reaſons, and in a ſpecial manner diſtinguiſhed from all others.

And what lover of the general intereſts of human nature, will pretend to ſay, that a function, the moſt important, in one ſenſe, of all others, ſhould be without eſtabliſhed laws, or that theſe ought wantonly, and at the caprice of every bigot to be broke? Is not ſuch a practice ſubverſive of that order and harmony, eſſential to every religious, as well as civil ſociety, without which public utility can never be obtained? Zeal without knowledge, is aſſuredly the enemy of truth. Yet daily experience convinces us, that uncouth attitudes;—Stentorian vociferation;—frightful epithets;—comical ſtories;—free confeſſions of former guilt;—miraculous converſions;—and aſſurance of Heaven, with daring aſſertions about Heaven's Arcana, or Supreme Decrees, will open pulpits—build chapels—gather crouds—regale the ſenſes—and lead to profit. Bigotry owes perhaps as much to its ſtaunch old nurſe Self-intereſt, as to its mother Ignorance.

On the other hand it hath been contended, that freedom of inquiry and judgment, is the unalien-

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able property of every rational creature. 'Tis the province of a man to think for himſelf, and the glory of a Chriſtian, to comply with the precepts of the Goſpel. With a becoming fortitude, yet with a decent and prudently regulated oppoſition; let us refuſe ſervile ſubmiſſion to all human eſtabliſhments or ſyſtems; merely becauſe they are ſuch. Never ought we to follow, ſave where conſcience points the way, nor if convinced by ſound experience of our ability to do good, ſhould we deſiſt from the attempt, though the mode may be rather contrary to that preſcribed, conſequently wants the ſanction of a party, or incurs the cenſure of the rigid conformiſt. Let not, ſay thoſe on the other ſide of the queſtion, the perſons pictured above, arrogate ſuch motives to themſelves; ſince theſe reſult from deliberate inquiry, and well-informed judgments; the former of which they are incapable of, and the latter their public harangues ſhew they never poſſeſſed.

Between the two might it not prove ſerviceable to religion? if both bent a little, and dropping all mutual prejudices, and unneceſſary diſtinctions, every one befriended, whomſoever they ſaw labouring to ſow the word of the kingdom, by promoting to their utmoſt, the glory of God, the plain practical truths of Chriſtianity, extending the ſphere of every benevolent affection; and cementing by the pureſt philanthropy, the general intereſts of mankind.

The ſeed is the word of God, here called the word of the kingdom, that is the Goſpel of our ſalvation, either upon account of its divine origin and extraction; or as it is the inſtrument, whereby the Almighty eſtabliſhes, and rears up the intereſts of virtue upon earth. In both theſe ſenſes, the expreſſion is of equal force. The Creator indeed has a natural kingdom, that is the government of the material world, and the regulation of all events. But by his word, or the word of his kingdom is generally meant Revelation, as containing ſuperior deſcriptions of his perfections,—his will,—and his laws: directly referring to that laſt, that beſt, and fulleſt diſcovery of his wonderous method, of reconciling the world to himſelf by Jeſus Chriſt. This again may be conſidered with relation to a Church in general, or the ſouls of individuals in particular, becauſe it is only by attention to, and due application thereof, that the truly good, are prepared for the Kingdom of Glory.

The preaching of the word is ſtrictly ſpeaking, the ſowing of the ſeed, though many other things frequently prove ſubſervient to this end: ſuch as prayers, afflictions, ſingular bleſſings, and the like. Happy are they who are enabled to ſow it in its proper ſeaſon, and on the fitteſt ſoils. Saith the wiſe man; In the morning ſow thy ſeed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand *. The public

* Eccleſ. xi. 6.

teachers

teachers of religion, ought to be extremely induſtrious in their profeſſion; and at equal pains to examine, what kind of ſeed they ſow. It muſt not be cunningly deviſed fables,—nor the traditions of men, though ſupported by the decrees and canons of general councils; but the ſimple, yet holy, and pure tenets of the Goſpel of Chriſt. If the Saviour himſelf condeſcended to ſay; My doctrine is not mine, but his that ſent me. The things that I have heard of my Father, thoſe ſpeak I in the world: How careful ſhould all be, acting under the ſanction of his authority, to diſſeminate nothing ſave the words of eternal life? It is called incorruptible ſeed,—Being born again, not of corruptible ſeed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever *.

By the ſoil is repreſented the minds of men; which in conſequence of their being differently qualified, occaſions a variety in the produce. Nor is that variety ſmall, like the faces of men, or the leaves of any given tree, they all have ſomething in common, to proclaim them of one ſpecies; yet not any two to be found exactly ſimilar. Some poſſeſs one faculty in an eminent degree; others another, while among thoſe excelling in the ſame, very different degrees of that excellence may be found. If the ſoil is not properly prepared, the ſeed will be loſt. Manuring, plowing, cleaning,

* 1 Pet. i. 23.

incloſing,

incloſing with ſeveral other things, are requiſite; nor by the ſkilful huſbandman, are they ever neglected. No ſmall degree of judgment is ſhewn in fitting the ſeed to the ſoil. The Prophet Hoſea cries,—Break up the fallow ground, ſow to yourſelves in righteouſneſs, reap in mercy. Some ground is ſoft, and eaſily wrought; others are hard, and ſtony, with difficulty broke:—and there are pieces of ſuch a nature, that no care or cultivation can make better. The analogy holds between theſe, and the human mind: which though allegorically, is nevertheleſs ſtrongly depicted by the Prophet,—And it ſhall come to paſs, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whitherſoever the rivers ſhall come, ſhall live: and there ſhall be a very great multitude of fiſh, becauſe theſe waters ſhall come thither; for they ſhall be healed, and every thing ſhall live, whither the river cometh. But the miry places thereof, and the marſhes thereof, ſhall not be healed, they ſhall be given to ſalt. And by the river upon the bank thereof on this ſide, and on that ſide, ſhall grow all trees for meat, whoſe leaf ſhall not fade, neither ſhall the fruit thereof be conſumed, it ſhall bring forth new fruit according to his months, becauſe their waters they iſſued out of the ſanctuary, and the fruit thereof, ſhall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine *.

* Ezek. xlvii. 9, 11, 12.

Our Saviour's deſign in this parable, as hath been already noticed, was, beſides characterizing his audience at that time, to mark the ſeveral effects the Goſpel would produce in ſucceeding ages. We ſhall therefore briefly draw the character, and make a few practical remarks, on the four kinds of hearers here ſpecified; as they ſtill may be ſuppoſed to form each reſpective Chriſtian audience. We truſt, it doth not argue want of charity, to dread, that greater numbers now-a-days, of the unfruitful kind of hearers, reſort to places of public worſhip, than in the time of primitive Chriſtianity, and we learn, there were many of that deſcription among the hearers of him, who ſpake, as never man ſpake.

The firſt claſs, are thoſe, to whom the word preached, is like ſeed thrown upon ſome highway, or much frequented path, where uncovered it neceſſarily turns out of none effect, being trodden down by the feet of paſſengers, or devoured by the fowls of the air. True indeed,—For many there are, who punctually attend the inſtitutions of religion; yet to no other purpoſe, than that of aggrandizing their own condemnation. The teachers of Chriſtianity by preaching, and the faithful diſcharge of other ſacred duties, ſow the word promiſcuouſly, to their hearers of whatever character; and to them only, becauſe, ſuch is the corruption of human nature, and ſo hardened in irreligion are many grown, that but few, comparatively

ratively ſpeaking, of thoſe baptized in the name of Jeſus, even deign to be hearers. It is not uncommon to hear people boaſting, of what length of time hath elapſed, ſince they witneſſed the public ſervices of religion: and thoſe who neglect them in public, will never perform them in private. Others declare, they cannot ſee, why one day ſhould be more holy than another: therefore dedicate the ſeventh, as well as the other ſix, to all faſhionable amuſements and diſſipation. To baniſh, as much as poſſible, the idea of religious matters, and to prevent irkſome thoughts about futurity, they will have company that day, ſhould they have none through the week. For ſuch conduct they might be juſtly upbraided, but the religion of Jeſus bids us pity them. They ſo deliberately, exclude themſelves from the means of grace; that they belong to none of the claſſes here ſtated, ſeeing this parable, can only be applied to thoſe, who in ſome meaſure attend the ſtated miniſtration of the word. Among whom, let us ſuppoſe the faithful Ambaſſador, hath been inſtant in ſeaſon, and out of ſeaſon, to unfold and enforce the Divine Will; by every argument drawn from Scripture and reaſon, the likeſt to have weight. Suppoſe he hath not limited, what Infinite Wiſdom hath made univerſal; namely, the Goſpel call: nor frighted the minds of the weak, by unfair and dreadful repreſentations of the Deity; but deſcribed him in the language of Revelation; as

the kind Parent of his creatures, rejoicing over them to do them good, and having no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but rather, that they ſhould turn and live. Suppoſe, that he hath recommended every moral precept in the moſt perſuaſive manner; and urged the neceſſity of uniform obedience from the ſtrongeſt motives. We ſay, ſuppoſe Miniſters have done all this, how deplorable is their caſe, who pay no attention thereto? Be aſſured, ye inconſiderate mortals! that ſlighted opportunities of ſalvation, ſhall not paſs unpuniſhed. Each Monitor now, will be an accuſer in the great day of accounts.

Under every diſpenſation of grace, and every mode of moral improvement, there have been many reaſons for thoſe who fill theſe public ſtations, to cry out;—Who hath believed our report? Of a truth ſince the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear; neither hath the eye ſeen, what he hath prepared for him, that waiteth for him. In the preſent day, —going to Church is quite unfaſhionable among the great; and only cuſtomary with thoſe who do go: they value not what is ſaid there; or dream they muſt one time or other account for what they hear. God forbid ſaid a philoſopher the other day, in a polite company, where for a wonder this topic was introduced, that I ſhould have to account for what little, I ever put it in the power, of any, to tell me from the pulpit; for the greater part of what

what I thence have heard, was groſs nonſenſe.—And pray, replied an intelligent Divine, who was preſent, and had alſo trod the circle of the arts and ſciences; allowing the remainder of what you have heard to be ſenſe, have you acted up to it? A man of ſcience, may be as great a dunce in religious matters, as the moſt thoughtleſs, or worldly minded.

How appoſite to this purpoſe is the Apoſtolic language? God hath choſen the fooliſh things of the world, to confound the wiſe: and God hath choſen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and baſe things of the world, and things which are deſpiſed, hath God choſen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are *. After all, we may juſtly aſk;—Whoſe fault is this, ſave their own? Can they reap advantage from what they never meditate upon?—never lay to heart?—We confeſs the ſpirit of God muſt prepare the heart for the reception of this ſeed, which by no means ſuperſedes, on the contrary, when well underſtood muſt ſtimulate us, in uſing our utmoſt ability to underſtand, and ſeriouſly apply the things pertaining to our eternal welfare. Let the enthuſiaſt dream of what he pleaſes; all ſober men agree, that we have never better right to expect the influences of the Divine Spirit, than when from a

* 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

principle of rectitude, we attempt every thing in our power, towards the acquiring holy diſpoſitions, and ſtrengthening every virtuous habit.

Such however, is, the diſmal infatuation of thoſe we now ſpeak of; that notwithſtanding their immortal happineſs, depends upon their acquaintance with the ſubjects diſcourſed of, yet they are inſenſible of this truth, conſequently, are at no pains to recollect, far leſs to practiſe it. The moſt active and ſagacious in ordinary matters; in religious may be blind and lazy. The Speculatiſt admits religion may be neceſſary to overawe vulgar minds, and induce them to ſobriety and honeſty; while they contend, that honour,—ſentiment,—and refined feelings, are nobler and ſufficient guides, to thoſe, in the more eminent ranks in ſociety. Many reduce, all religion, to the rigid obſervance of juſtice, in their tranſactions with their fellow-creatures. Juſtice no doubt is an exceeding comprehenſive virtue; and may be ſo ſtretched, as to include every relation of a rational being. But the poſitive fulfilment of all its duties to one another, can in this caſe be but one branch, and that not the firſt: ſeeing, as creatures, the firſt duties, or acts of obedience and gratitude, belong to the Creator. It is not a rare thing to hear men going out of the world, in ſome meaſure boaſting that they have properly ſuſtained the character of honeſt men, who in all points of Chriſtianity were as ſtupid as mules, and knew no more of the Goſpel, than

that

that its author was Jeſus Chriſt, and that there are Parſons,—Bibles,—Prayer Books,—Sacraments,—and Sundays. Numbers look upon all religion, and the idea of a future judgment, to be the device of politicians,—the cunning of prieſts,—the bugbear of the timid,—the concern of fanatics,—and words of courſe, which ſome muſt utter, becauſe they are paid for it. Should ſuch from particular caſualties,—perhaps the feſtival days,—charity ſermons;—viſitations;—anniverſaries;—fine ſinging by capital comedians;—the organ by celebrated muſicians;—find themſelves at church, they deem it meritorious to praiſe the muſic,—and acknowledge, that the company was genteel. Sometimes they praiſe too the orator,—though the greater number cenſure his ſentiment, and find fault with his peculiarities. Need we point out the impropriety of all this in aſſemblies, where the deepeſt humility becomes us, being in his preſence, in whoſe eyes our own faults are numerous, and aggravated, enough to engroſs all our cenſure; and our enjoyments more than our warmeſt gratitude can expreſs; or loftieſt ſtrains of adoration equal the perfections of the Almighty Giver.

In a word, in the heart of the highway hearers; every luſt hath a free paſſage: in them, is the way of evil, implying frequency, from the idea of a beaten path. A good man may be overtaken with temptation, only, the wicked perſiſt in what is evil. For this reaſon, David prayed, that God

would watch him, to ſee whether there was in him a way of evil, that is, ſins, which had not been reſiſted, or habits, that had undergone no change.

Common roads often run through the fineſt fields of corn: and highways being generally contiguous to the furrows thereof, muſt occaſionally receive handfuls of the richeſt ſeed. But then it is either trodden by the feet of travellers, or picked up by the fowls of the air. That cunning old ſerpent, who diſlikes not the appellation, from the recollection, that under the appearance of that creature, he ſpoiled the faireſt of the works of God below; hath fraud for his nature, and the deſtruction of ſouls is his trade. By ſuggeſting other thoughts, and preſenting temporal objects, in the moſt alluring manner, to ſuch careleſs minds, kills the word, that was ſown in their hearts. Soon do his artifices, joined to the aid received from a corrupt heart, obliterate the good impreſſions, that may have tranſiently been made; or ſo obdurate the conſcience, and block up the finer feelings, as that the ſmalleſt connection between the ſoul and divine truths never ſubſiſts. This is not, that the grand enemy of our redemption, hath power to rob men of their religious ideas by any immediate act, or controul over the human mind: Unqueſtionably he poſſeſſes no ſuch power, but becauſe by neglect and careleſsneſs, they expoſe themſelves to the whole force of his

pernicious

pernicious ſchemes. A ſleeping centinel cannot wonder, at his being ſurprized. Nor can the Chriſtian caught by the bait, which he never took the trouble ſufficiently to examine.

We have more than common report, for the devil's being a very great traveller. And the Lord ſaid unto Satan, From whence comeſt thou? And Satan anſwered the Lord, and ſaid, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it*. The Jews are wont to call Samael, by whom they mean the devil, the pricked, here named the wicked one, who goeth about ſeeking whom he may devour, and conſcious that the word of the kingdom, is an enemy to his deſigns; he ſtands prepared with a thouſand engines or machinations, to catch it away, or prevent its effects. He knows it is not for him, to let people muſe upon it, leſt it ſhould lead them to conſider their ſituation, and by its native charms engroſſing their affections, take deep root in their hearts. The word rightly received, in the love and ſimplicity thereof, reſembles leaven; which quickly leavens the whole lump. Of courſe David ſays; thy word have I hid in my heart. He is called the Prince of the powers of the air, and legions are at his command, who watch the ground, that is neither plowed before, nor harrowed after; in order to ſeize as lawful prey whatever they can

* Job ii. 2.

catch.

catch. It is ſaid, they received ſeed ſo far as this, it fell upon them, but deſcended not into them, and birds are always obſerved, to watch new ſown fields.

The various ways, whereby the adverſary catches the word are many, or to ſpeak ſtill plainer, the grounds of inattention, among many others, may be the following.

The minds of ſome may ſuggeſt,—becauſe I am in an humbler rank of life, why ſhould I regard religion, more than I perceive thoſe who are above me do? The irreligion of many, is in exact proportion to their riches, their independance, or their birth, or titles. The great, ſays ſuch a character, have their routs, and why ſhould not I have my private indulgences? To be ſure, the Parſon tells me, I am wrong, but what of that? Is he not a man? Have I not ſeen him guilty of things, which his lips publicly have condemned? and were that not the caſe, why ſhould his opinion influence mine? This may be too true;—but give me leave to tell ſuch, that whoſoever is guilty of ſin muſt anſwer for it, and that in proportion to its various aggravations, whether ariſing from circumſtance or character. At any rate his ſin, cannot be your apology. We admit no opinion ought to influence farther, than when it is an undeniable truth, that he who offers it, hath truth upon his ſide. And in caſes of religion, we contend, that the bulk of thoſe who reject advice, are the individuals

individuals, who ſtand in moſt need of it. Thoſe the apteſt to ſay,—what is it to us what the Parſon ſays, are generally the moſt inattentive to every concern of their ſouls, and think the more of every thing, than that, which the moſt concerneth them.

Perſonal prejudices, frequently obſtruct the impreſſions of the word of God. Becauſe he is not an orator:—Becauſe he is not a ſcholar:—Becauſe he was not ordained by the hands of a prelate: Becauſe he hath his failings, many diſregard all the preacher can ſay. To every tale-bearer, they ſaid of the venerable Prophet Jeremiah of old; Report, and we will report: and in theſe later times, the ſhewy profeſſor deſtitute of merit and conſcious rectitude, rather than not report, will moſt maliciouſly deviſe. The darling employment of the hypocrite is, to attaint brilliant worth, or modeſt virtue.

Others, of this infatuated race apprehend, becauſe they were born of Chriſtian parents, and within the pale of the viſible Church, that therefore there is no danger of their final happineſs: nay, to ſuch a length hath this been carried, that numbers have imagined the taking of the Sacrament, was a paſſport to bliſs: otherwiſe, why recommend it to the moſt abandoned wretches, doomed to die? A Church-going man as they term it, among the vulgar, is reckoned no inconſiderable character, though perhaps the bench on which

which he ſits, hath equal pretenſions to religious knowledge.

Thouſands are hardened in their impiety from the miſtaken idea, that the Goſpel forbids all enjoyment, and is an enemy to pleaſure. Shall we, cry they, become mere recluſes, and ſhare the rigidity of a cloiſter, without granting the abſurdity of the name? Muſt we hang our heads like bulruſhes, and ſeem afraid to behold the heavens, the natural privilege of men. To be Chriſtians, muſt we be unſocial animals, and fly all ſociety, except that congenial, to the melancholy gloom of a ſterile ſoul? Am I criminal, if I keep company with any, but thoſe of a particular caſt? or do a kindneſs to any, but thoſe of a certain name in religious matters. To the hurt of Chriſtianity, and the diſgrace of reaſon, ſuch narrow notions have been patronized by illiberal minds; and of courſe have become a ſtumbling block to multitudes. From the grimace, and burleſque thrown upon piety, by the wanton and the ſuperſtitious, what precious ſouls have from the eaſy infection been irrevocably loſt.

After all, theſe are but a few of the ways in which the wicked one catches away the word; for it abideth not in the hearts of careleſs hearers; whoſe ſtate ultimately will be more deſperate, than if they never had enjoyed Goſpel privileges. Thus ſaith the Redeemer, If I had not come,

and ſpoken unto them, they had not had ſin: but now they have no cloak for their ſin *.

Verſe 20th. *But he that received the ſeed into ſtony places, the ſame is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.*

Prayer and meditation are the former and latter rains, without which, it will never yield its increaſe, nor bloſſom up to heaven. The Holy Spirit, muſt not only ſow the word in our hearts; but muſt continually water it with refreſhing influences, elſe it will wither, it will die. The force of truth, will frequently reach the heart, in ſome ſmall degree; over the moſt accumulating difficulties, though it may be unable to keep its place. We have already ſaid, that with the firſt claſs of hearers, the moſt trivial object, the moſt vain and volatile fancy, the moſt fooliſh and wicked prejudice, or the ſlighteſt ſuggeſtion of an evil companion, is ſufficient to lock up their attention—O dreadful thought! even from God himſelf, ſpeaking in his own word. Is it not eaſy in our weekly aſſemblies, to collect what a total ignorance of the nature of ſpiritual devotion prevails, from the very deportment of individuals? In the moſt ſolemn part of the ſervice, to ſee them beckoning, and ſmiling, to their acquaintance, is pitiful indeed. Were their hearts impreſſed with the excellent ſentiments, they mum-

* John xv. 22.

ble

ble over with their tongues, this would not be the caſe. A worldly mind is the ſource of all this diſorder. Vice unchecked will for ever keep the heart a ſtranger to God, whereas a view of its odious nature, and awful demerits; as appearing in the great atonement requiſite to aboliſh it, would make them pant after the joyful ſound of peace and pardon, and zealous in the practice of piety.

In the verſe now read, we have a ſecond claſs of hearers, who went a great way farther than the former, and yet were none of his. They readily caught good impreſſions, though they proved evaneſcent. They hear the word, yea, and what is more, with alacrity too, as Herod is ſaid to have heard John the Baptiſt gladly. They are not accidental hearers, like the former inattentive ones; but added to their punctuality, are diligent in the hearing of it. They give their aſſent to it, make profeſſion of it for a while, being under ſome convictions of the truth of it, and poſſeſſing ſome judgment in it; have ſome flaſhes of affection for it, and become qualified to ſpeak of it tolerably, and to ſhew a kind of delight in it. All this may be, where the natural hardneſs of the heart continues, and the individual be deſtitute of ſpiritual life, without true repentance towards God, and genuine faith in Jeſus Chriſt. For true faith works contrition and godly ſorrow, only in thoſe hearts, where the

ſeed

ſeed of the world takes root, and who continue faithful unto the end.

Notwithſtanding the degeneracy of mankind, the idea of immortality is inſeparable from our nature, and it is next to an impoſſibility, at all ſeaſons, to ſhut out convictions of the propriety of religion, and the certainty of a future ſtate. The deeper we ponder on our ſituation in this world, the more theſe thoughts occur, and the juſter they ſeem. Man in the moments of calm reflection, is not more a rational than a religious being. Our own experience will convince us of this. The hopes and fears nevertheleſs, of thoſe who act from no ſteady principle, are eaſily wrought upon, and every motive almoſt can influence them. Hence multitudes appear touched with the intereſting points of Chriſtianity, when after all, it is naught but the eloquence or manner of the ſpeaker, aptly coinciding, with the ſtate of their temper at that period; and thereby their paſſions are moved. During this fervor, it is impoſſible to aſcertain the real character: from the effects on the morals of the perſon, the rational concluſion muſt be drawn.

Hypocrites, often get the ſtart of the truly good in the ſhews of religion. Of the ſeed it is ſaid, that having no deepneſs of earth to ſtrike the root downwards, through the reflection of the heat upon the rocks and ſtones, it quickly broke through the thin ſurface over them, and appeared much

before the uſual time. So the profeſſors here deſcribed; for want of real integrity, and a good underſtanding; only bring forth the externals of religion: that is, the ſtalk or blade of a Chriſtian profeſſion, having the form of godlineſs without the power. Theſe things being ſo, let us guard againſt laying a falſe foundation, or truſting to any thing ſhort of that, which the word of God lays as the firm grounds of our hope and final acceptance. May we ever count on our graces and progreſs in ſanctification, more than our gifts; which, without being properly applied, can only enhance our puniſhment in that day, when every man's work ſhall be tried by fire. O what need of ſelf-examination have we all!—and in pointed ſoliloquies thus to addreſs ourſelves. My ſoul,—what is the ſcope of thy religious acknowledgments? Is it to get a name among men?—or to catch their applauſe to-day, who to-morrow may revile thee? Is it ſelf-intereſt, or thoſe external honours and advantages attached to it? Is happineſs more thy aim in a future ſtate, than holineſs in the preſent? Whence ariſes thy joy? Doth it continue? That of the hypocrite ſoon abates. Canſt thou rejoice in the Lord, when all outward comforts fail thee? ſaying with Habbacuc: Although the fig-tree ſhall not bloſſom, neither ſhall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive ſhall fail, and the field ſhall yield no meat, and the flock ſhall be cut off from the fold, and there ſhall be no herd in the ſtalls.

Yet

Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my ſalvation. Am I low, when my condition in the world is advanced? Can I abaſe myſelf before God, and mourn moſt for thoſe ſins, that leaſt appear before men? Are the fruits of the word in thee, faith, love, meekneſs, humility, long-ſuffering, temperance, charity, and patience? then thou art ſecure.

But to return, we are informed of ſuch hearers, that anon, intimating how eagerly and inſtantaneouſly, with joy they receive it. More than pleaſed, they are tranſported with heavenly truths. Our Lord ſaid of ſome of John's hearers: Ye rejoiced in the light for a ſeaſon. St. Luke in his narration ſays, they believed for a while, of courſe reſembled thoſe Jews, who believed in Chriſt when they ſaw his miracles, to whom he would not however commit himſelf, becauſe he knew what was in them. Simon Magus believed;—the Devils believe, but what avails it? No more doth the unmeaning joy, wherewith the enthuſiaſt receives the tidings of the Goſpel: He may believe in the perfections of God; and yet never by grace be inclined to caſt all his cares upon him, entirely truſting to his word, and depending on his goodneſs. This act of his doth not transform him into the image of Chriſt. An excellent writer on the parables hath here ſaid:—The ſtony ground hearers believe a man muſt be a new creature that would be ſaved; but they are not made new creatures,

that they may be ſaved. They believe they muſt be changed, but are not changed by believing. In a word, they have not much care to receive, not much underſtanding to apprehend, not much faith to believe, not much will to obey, and not much love to retain it. They may be tolerably right in the manner of their obedience, but wrong in the matter of it. Thus we read of ſome of the Iſraelitiſh monarchs, they did that which was right in the ſight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart. Rigid to an extreme, in ceremonials, they deny not the private indulgence, nor on all occaſions take up their croſs, and follow Chriſt. In many reſpects, they obey the laws of the Goſpel, without loving them. The equity of obedience with thoſe of this claſs, is nothing near ſo prepollent a motive, as the fear of incurring the penalty. Their zeal, inſtead of being according to knowledge of the tenets avowed; is of a piece with that of Jehu, who cried, Come, and ſee my zeal for the Lord of hoſts, when ambition, and a crown in proſpect, were the genuine motives. They may, from a regard to decency and other cauſes, emancipate themſelves from the habits of groſs outward ſins; without a perfect abhorrence of them. With numbers, ſin may be out of the converſation, and as deep-rooted as ever in the affections. It muſt be granted, that they may have a ſpecies of inward joy, creating a fatal illuſion, not tending to ſpiritual improvement: for of them

them it is even ſaid, they take a delight in approaching to God. Yet they ſeek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteouſneſs, and forſook not the ordinance of their God *. The word of God, according to another Prophet, is to them, as a very lovely ſong of one, that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play well on an inſtrument.

Verſe 21ſt. *Yet hath he not root in himſelf, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation, or perſecution ariſeth, becauſe of the word, by and by he is offended.*

It is not uncommon we ſay, for the word of God, ſenſibly to affect ſome perſons for a time, in whom it nevertheleſs takes no root. Their affections, from a peculiarity of conſtitution, ſwell like an overflowing brook, aided by cataracts from a long chain of neighbouring hills, but with equal haſte ſubſide. The greateſt boaſters are ſeldom relied on, nor can the too warm zealot run long. To vaunt of ſtrength before trial is made, or of a victory before the battle, is rather to be conſidered as the voice of temerity, than of cool fortitude. So to profeſs high degrees of love to a Redeemer; ſuperior attachment to his cauſe; inexpreſſible tranſports in his ſervice; with invariable aſſurance of his favour here, and of his glory hereafter:—we ſay, to be for ever declaiming on the

* If. lviii. 2.

above, and ſuch like topics; yet evidently be living, under the influence of an uncharitable, and cenſorious ſpirit, with the moſt glaring faults in the moral conduct, is the very eſſence of preſumption, but hath not a ſingle ray of ſpiritual wiſdom.

The ſtony ground hearer hath no root in himſelf; that is, no principle of virtue in the heart. It is this Job means, when he characterizes the righteous man, as having the root of the matter in him. Such as are without this, will go no farther for righteouſneſs ſake, than mounting ſpirits, and fermenting blood will bear them. Some in theſe fits, have perpetrated the blackeſt deeds, and what is more amazing, met the ſevereſt puniſhments for them, not only with firmneſs, but with triumph. Some have renounced all ſocial enjoyments, and ſubmitted to the greateſt hardſhips, in order to ſuſtain a peculiar character, or ſucceed in ſome favourite enterprize. And not a few enthuſiaſts, when the fervor ſubſides, owing to the infirmities of age;—to diſappointments;—to poverty;—or diſtreſs;—they loathe the comforts that remain;—grow tired of the world,—and of life. They form improper notions of futurity;—unjuſt ideas of God;—diſdain to wait patiently for the moſt certain of all events;—and plunge into eternity by a cord, by poiſon, by a piſtol, or a knife.

Should matters not come to theſe violent extremes, thoſe of the ſtamp we deſcribe, will walk

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no longer in the paths of piety, than they imagine it conduces to gain the end they propoſed, whether riches, honours, or reputation. The real intereſts of genuine goodneſs, will not receive much ſupport from them; ſeeing there are no habits of virtue in their affections. However pleaſant, the tidings of grace and ſalvation may have ſounded in their ears; or with whatever rapture, they have admired the Chriſtian diſpenſation in all its parts, they, to gain all it propoſes, could not hold out to the end. Saith the ſacred word: ſo run that ye may obtain,—the ſame informs us of many, that for a while ran well, till the attacks which their pride, or enſnaring foible received from it, and the ſuggeſtions of the inward Monitor, ſo fettered them, that no longer they obeyed the truth. Now they, pretend to diſcover flaws in the Goſpel ſcheme, which they ſaw not before, that is, the better ſight they obtain by means thereof, of their own hearts, the clearer they diſcern their inability to come up to the extent, the purity of the divine law; and by a fatal error in judgment, adhere to the preſent enjoyments, while they reſign their pretenſions to the future, becauſe unſeen. Whenever they perceive, that they cannot hold their profeſſion, without the danger of loſing their ſelfiſh or private indulgences;—their liberty;—their eſtate;—their places;—preferment, and perhaps life itſelf; they quickly diſcover whoſe ſervants they are;—directly take offence;—ſtumble in their courſe;—and

too often fall entirely from the practice, and ſometimes even from the profeſſion of piety. For there are none more virulent enemies to the truth, than thoſe who ſet out in the ſtricteſt opinions concerning it. We have been told, that ſome of the firſt-rate literary characters, whoſe works delight and inſtruct the preſent age; that they themſelves, in the earlier part of life, bordered upon being bigots to their reſpective profeſſions, however nearly to Atheiſm, their publications, whether from the preſs, or in dialogue, afterwards advanced. Few become more abandoned, than thoſe who for a time ſeemed virtuous.

The diſmal change happens to many, through a kind of levity, prompting them to ſtudy with alacrity every new propoſal, or intricate paradox. Herein are comprehended two kinds of hearers, might we aſſume the liberty of ſubdiviſion:—firſt, thoſe who as the apoſtle writes, are wafted about by every kind of doctrine; the laſt with them is always the beſt; and on a ſtrict inſpection it will be found, they have ſo traverſed from one ſect to another, and been of ſo many different opinions in religious affairs, as renders it hazardous to affirm, what perſuaſion they really are of; or indeed if they have any religion at all. A wavering, unſtayed conduct, ſufficiently indicates the want of fixed principles. To weigh well the tenets of any ſect before embracing them is wiſe; nor is it leſs ſo, to adhere to them, thus choſen.

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The ſecond claſs conſiſts of thoſe, who receive the Goſpel with ſome degree of knowledge, and as far as we can judge, ſeem deſirous of living accordingly: but through mere weakneſs of reſolution, and want of attention to what paſſes within them, diſcharge not the duties they would, and yield to the very temptations, they wiſh to overcome.

Under the firſt of theſe claſſes, they rank, who are every thing by turns, juſt as pride, paſſion, or intereſt domineers. They like the weathercock, veer to every wind that blows: and probably the grounds of their change, inſtead of ariſing from material errors diſcovered, or arguments ſwaying their judgments, are confeſſedly trivial. The Preacher's manner did not pleaſe them in one place, in another they diſliked his dreſs,—his language,—his look,—or his innocent amuſements. For frivolous as all theſe are, numbers having a great conceit of themſelves, have deſerted particular places of public worſhip, to which they were uſed to reſort, on ſuch pretences. Others have forſaken places, becauſe they could not have ſuch a ſeat as they wanted: or becauſe thoſe ſat in it, whom they did not like. Many leave evangelical Miniſters of approved abilities, becauſe they are poor;—or becauſe few attend them;—and they follow the multitude, without examining the ground of their attachments, or the reaſons why they run to this place rather than that.

Under the ſecond, a far more diſcerning and worthy claſs of people may be ranked; who have good hearts; are right in their principles;—would not injure the leaſt of their fellow-creatures;—rejoice in beneficence;—acutely feel another's woe;—yet, through an exceſs of ſenſibility, and generous warmth of unſuſpecting temper, are frequently illaqueated in the mazes of error, and hurried into irregularity of behaviour.

To be more particular, there is a time, when the word of Chriſt's kingdom comes to be the word of his patience, as it is called in the book of Revelations; then is the trial of ſincerity. The ſame ſun which warms and cheriſhes the ſeed ſown in good ground; withers and burns up that which wants root. The ſame tribulation, which drives ſome to apoſtacy and ruin, works for others, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. God in his providence tries all them that are his; or who, without being really ſuch, rank under the ſtandard of redeeming love, diſplayed in the Goſpel. Perſecution or tribulation in the cauſe of truth; is compared to the ſcorching beams of the ſun, which quickly dries up, the ſeeming ſpiritual beauty, in unſound profeſſors. When unexpected troubles ariſe, which fruſtrate the vain hopes, the ſtony ground profeſſor, conceived of temporal peace and proſperity, then is he ſcandalized, that is offended at it. There is no other way to the crown ſave by the croſs: for an Apoſtle tells us, that

that all who would live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, muſt ſuffer trials of ſome kind; according to the expreſs legacy of our dear Redeemer himſelf:—In this world, ſaid he to his diſciples, ye ſhall have tribulation. The great adverſary of ſouls, diſturbs to the utmoſt of his power, all who fight not under his banner, and the world loveth but its own: therefore Luke ſays of the ſeed ſown on ſtony ground, that as ſoon as it ſprung up, it withered away, becauſe it lacked moiſture.

We admit, the very beſt characters have reaſon to complain of imperfections, which nevertheleſs hath not the leaſt application to ſtony ground hearers: in whom, for want of moiſture and earth, the word taketh no root. Such under the means of ſoftening, become more hard, they ſtretch out their hand againſt God, and ſtrengthen themſelves againſt the Almighty. Mark, in narrating the parable ſays:—Not much earth: as if he had ſaid, they taſte the good word of God, but do not feed upon it. Like powder without ball they make a noiſe, yet do no execution. By moiſture, we apprehend, is meant the exerciſes of true devotion, and the aids of the Divine Spirit, whereby the word of the kingdom is rooted,—grows,—and brings forth ſpiritual fruit.

Let the fanatics rant away as they pleaſe, about living above the world; yet on a minute ſcrutiny, the things beneath the ſtars, will be found the moſt in their eye: while a ſupercilious haughtineſs diſcriminates

diſcriminates their conduct. They forget that their readineſs to ſpy the mote in the eye of another, is no weak ſymptom of there being a beam in their own. For examples of elucidation, they keenly look abroad into every character, with which they are acquainted: though the ſureſt might with leſs danger, and far greater propriety, be found at home. And if love be the fulfilling of the law, is not the want of it, to our brother whom we have ſeen, a flagrant proof of our neither being rooted, nor grounded in the faith? He that backbiteth with his tongue, and taketh up a reproach againſt his neighbour, ſhall not aſcend God's holy hill. In a word, of the ſtony ground hearers it may be remarked, that they either die in hypocriſy, or periſh by apoſtacy. The righteous, ſaith Job, ſhall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands, ſhall grow ſtronger and ſtronger: whereas to the enthuſiaſtic hearers of Goſpel truth, there in fact, is only an accumulation of guilt; implying, that of puniſhment; ariſing, from their having known ſomething of the way of righteouſneſs.

To guard againſt this, let us therefore take heed to our ways, and abide in him, without whom we cannot bring forth fruit to the glory of God. Bleſſed is the man that truſteth in the Lord, and whoſe hope the Lord is. For he ſhall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that ſpreadeth out her roots by the river, and ſhall not ſee when heat cometh,

cometh, but her leaf ſhall be green, and ſhall not be careful in the year of drought, neither ſhall ceaſe from yielding fruit *.

Verſe 22d. *He alſo that received ſeed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulneſs of riches, choke the word; and he becometh unfruitful.*

It may be fairly queſtioned, whether the enthuſiaſt underſtands the truth in its native preciſion, though this cannot be denied of the hearers, here ſpecified. They neither jeſt at religion, nor treat it with neglect. Yet after all, the love of riches, name, connections, and worldly pleaſures captivates their affections, and deceives their judgments. They would willingly ſerve both God and Mammon: than which there cannot be a greater impoſſibility. Ah! How many ſouls come this length, and yet periſh for ever!—What avails our coming nigh the gates of heaven, if we enter not in! Better never to have had a view of felicity, than not to obtain it: becauſe the acuteneſs of the torment reſulting from the loſs, will be in proportion to the power, we once had of acquiring it. Perſons of the above denomination, wiſh to be ſaved, but the toilſome cares of a preſent life intervene, whoſe luxuriant growth, and baneful influence they are unable to reſiſt; and this not ſo much from want of power, as want of

* Jer. xvii. 7, 8.

will.

will. For ſince the grace of God hath appeared, bringing ſalvation unto all men, how ſhall they eſcape who reject ſo great ſalvation? The juſteſt reaſon that can be aſſigned is; becauſe it poſitively inſiſteth on our living righteouſly and ſoberly in this preſent world; redeeming the time, for that the days are evil. Bad men, for the moſt part, look no farther than the grave, and know of no higher, or more refined enjoyments, than thoſe of ſenſe and appetite; ſo that while grace, and an immoderate concern about the things of this world, are irreconcileable, they can never be truly happy, who are immerſed in the latter.

Thorns may be a tolerable guard to the corn when they are in the hedge; but muſt prove deſtructive when they are in the field: ſeeing they keep the ſun-beams from the tender blade, and with ranker roots draw away the nutritive juices, thereby preventing the richneſs of the crop. Thorns and briers are dens for ſerpents, and receptacles for hurtfulneſs, conſequently, a fit repreſentation of that heart, where irregular paſſions predominate. Thorns naturally wound whoſoever meddleth with them; ſo they that will be rich, fall into many temptations, and pierce themſelves through with many ſorrows. They are for the moſt part unprofitable things, and generally caſt into the fire at laſt. So are earthly purſuits, when ſpiritual ones are neglected, and finally lead to a ſimilar end. We admit that the ſoil about the hedge

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or incloſure, is uſually richer and deeper, than that on the way-ſide, or in ſtony places; wherefore the ſeed, which accidentally falls here, will be likely after a time to take root, nor is it liable to be trod upon, or inſtantly ſcorched with heat. But then unhappily, as the ſtones deſtroyed the root in the one place, the thorns which, through the luxuriance of the ſoil, ſpring up in abundance, deſtroy the fruit in the other. This fitly ſhadows forth the effects, which the Goſpel produces on their minds, who amidſt all their pretenſions to religion, are yet men of the world, and bring not forth ſuch fruit, as might reaſonably be expected from their profeſſion. They think ſo far as to collect tolerably juſt notions, concerning revelation in all its parts. Without grimace or parade, they make a public profeſſion, and by their neighbours are recognized as ſober, ſedate Chriſtians. Mark the iſſue, they go forth, to uſe the language of Luke, into the world; connect themſelves too cloſely with the buſineſs and amuſements of life, till each ſerious impreſſion gradually weakening, they conform to the example of the thoughtleſs, and the principles of the wicked.

Under theſe terms, the cares of this world, and the deceitfulneſs of riches, and the luſts of other things as the Evangeliſt Mark hath it; or the pleaſures of life according to Luke, our bleſſed Redeemer comprehends, all that St. John calls the luſt of the eye, the luſt of the fleſh, and the pride

pride of life. Theſe ſeize the attention, exerciſe the thoughts, take up the time, and engroſs the affections. Nor can it be otherwiſe; ſince, as the Apoſtle ſaith, the Spirit ſtriveth againſt the fleſh, and the fleſh luſteth againſt the Spirit. Hard indeed, is their bondage, ſevere their drudgery, whoſe fleſh prevails. Owing to this, the natural and proper operation of the word, on the judgment and conſcience is obſtructed. None of the amiable graces of humility, meekneſs, temperance, ſimplicity, and benevolence adorn their practice. Their character for ſobriety, juſtice and decency, ſtands unimpeached by men; whilſt the duties of piety are careleſsly performed: thoſe of friendſhip and Chriſtian love, little attended to, and thoſe of mortification and ſelf-denial, almoſt wholly forgotten. Should there be ſome few, rather well-looking bloſſoms, which even form into fruit; yet as Luke remarks, they bring none to perfection, being blaſted by temporal ſtorms, and conſumed by craving appetites, more deſtructive than caterpillars to the fruit of the trees, or bands of locuſts to the tender herbage.

Can there be a more lamentable caſe? Would it were leſs common!—What a pity, that thoſe convinced that the Lord is gracious, ſhould not give all diligence to make their calling and election ſure? O what a quantity of precious ſeed hath the vile allurements of ſenſe rendered abortive, which otherwiſe would have ripened unto eternal life?

Say

Say ye worldly wiſe, who after all are only ſelf-deceivers, how many convictions have ye reſiſted? how many vows and reſolutions have ye buried beneath temporal ſchemes, and ſacrificed to enjoyments, highly degrading to your intellectual abilities? All theſe, with every other miſimproved favour, muſt be accounted for. Have you not in your public attendance on the ordinances, and inſtitutions of religion, or in your private reflections on futurity, been obliged to confeſs, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom, and unaffected piety, is the ſweeteſt, yet nobleſt ornament of humanity? While you habitually have perſiſted in vicious courſes, nor would abate your eagerneſs in the attainment of momentary pleaſures; however deeply they had ſtung you already. To this charge, none of us dare plead innocent. How many, when their conſciences are alarmed by the word, powerfully and faithfully preached unto them, have reſolved to become new men, without counting the difficulty, or in other words the ſpiritual coſt? Forgetful of what our Redeemer ſays, that if an evil ſpirit be once caſt out, and able to gain admittance into the heart again, he bringeth with him more evil ſpirits; the better to inſure his poſſeſſion in times to come: thoſe we ſpeak of, ſo quickly, and with ſuch aggravations fall back into their old ways of iniquity, as would incline one to think, they had rather repented of their repentance, than of their ſins;

and

and that they had not grieved ſo much for having lived wickedly, as for afterwards having promiſed, they would endeavour to live well.

To be more particular; by the cares of this world, are meant all criminal anxiety about ſecular concerns. In guarding againſt one extreme, let us with equal caution mark the other. A prudent care, aſſiſted by induſtry and ſobriety, is enjoined from divine Providence, by the annexing to every one, his reſpective lot in ſociety. He that provideth not for his family, is worſe than an infidel. No pretence of abſtractedneſs from the world, will juſtify indolence, in trying to procure by labour and honeſt means, the neceſſaries of life; which our Father in Heaven knows we need. Many worthy Chriſtians, with all the pains they can take, are often under the heavieſt embarraſſments, and with numerous families are reduced to the moſt abject penury. To tell ſuch, that they ought to be equally compoſed, as thoſe whoſe corn and wine doth abound, is to the laſt degree abſurd, nor admits the leaſt alleviation from the precepts of religion, more than the feelings of humanity. In connexion with the future period of our exiſtence, ſuch things may not prove to have been evils, but we contend they are afflictions, of which the beſt hearts muſt have a lively ſenſe, which prey on their ſpirits, and much interrupt the compoſure of their religious duties: ſtill there may in ſuch perſons be an humble, though

not a perfect ſubmiſſion to the will of God. On the other hand, that ſolicitude about temporals, which implies diſtruſt in the divine goodneſs, and drives ſome almoſt to diſtraction, by for ever anticipating diſtreſſes, is ſinful to a very great degree. Numbers are guilty in this reſpect, who are in actual poſſeſſion not only of a competence, but of affluence: admitting things may turn worſe, ſufficient for the day are the evils thereof, what wiſe man will loſe the preſent comfort, that next year he dreads the want of; forgetting that next day he may have no more occaſion for it? What a multitude of ſelf-tormentors, may be found in each walk in ſociety? who are continually diſquieted by imaginary evils. See yon poor meagre-looking wretch! who is afraid to put a bit in his mouth, except it be of the cheapeſt, and then he cares not for its coarſeneſs; becauſe he dreads the being reduced to poverty, or that his children may want. This harrows up his very ſoul. The horrid ſpectres of contempt, famine, and a priſon haunt his gloomy ſoul. He fancies himſelf turned out of his dwelling, his ſubſtance torn from him by mercileſs creditors: his dear babes crying for bread, and he and they juſt on the point of ſtarving. To eſcape theſe miſeries, or to hold them at a diſtance, he racks his invention, and ſcarce allows himſelf time for neceſſary reſt. Theſe ſad thoughts, engendered by gloomineſs and timidity, ſtrengthened by a ſinful diſtruſt of Provi-

dence, and promoted by the artful ſuggeſtions of the devil, follow him night and day, embarraſs his mind, prey upon his ſpirits, and make him wretched to the laſt degree.

Nor muſt we paſs unnoticed the multitudes of peeviſh, ſuſpicious perſons; whoſe whole ideas are engroſſed by deviſing ſchemes of enlarging their trade; repairing diſappointments, or guarding againſt loſſes. Nay, ſome dark illiberal ſouls of this claſs deſcend ſo low, that they can ſpare not a moment for ſerious reflection, in watching their domeſtics; leſt they ſhould impoſe on them, by either not working enough, or giving away, the leaſt article without their knowledge; or eating and drinking more themſelves, than the ſcanty pittance, to which their meanneſs confines them. People of this deſcription are generally found to be in the middling ranks of life. A prudent, and juſt œconomy, is incumbent on every man, according to his ſituation in ſociety, nor are we deſired to be inſenſible, when we are enjoined to be careful for nothing. If we are proſperous, let us be thankful; remembering the ſtate, in which perhaps we once were. With my ſtaff I came over this Jordan, and now lo—I am become two bonds, ſaid good old Jacob. Be our caſe ever ſo hard, we may reſt confident, that the inexhauſtible benignity, which arrays the lilies of the field, and hears the ravens cry for food, will give us food and raiment. How would it have conduced to

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the felicity of thouſands, had they been but one twentieth part as anxious about their Salvation, as they have been about worldly concerns? An immoderate care is eaſily known by its ſtrength, and uniform prevalency. It either excludes every thing ſerious, or when ſervices of that kind are attempted, the heart goes after its covetouſneſs. One would imagine, the inutility of ſolicitude, would be a ſufficient diſſuaſive from it. 'Tis vain to riſe up early, and ſit up late, to eat the bread of carefulneſs. 'Tis a reproach to religion, as if we could not find ſatisfaction therein, without the quantity of creature comforts we might wiſh. If our hearts be overcharged with ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, and the cares of this life; is not there a riſque, that death may come upon us quite unprepared for it?

Away then with theſe diſtreſſing fears;—remember who hath ſaid, for the ſupport of the faithful at large: Fear not, Abram; I am thy ſhield, and thy exceeding great reward. Is he not faithful who hath promiſed, that he will never leave or forſake us? And hath bid us,—Caſt all your care upon him, ſeek firſt the kingdom of Heaven, and his righteouſneſs, and all other eſſential things ſhall be added unto you. Truſt in the Lord, and do good, and verily thou ſhalt be fed.

Riches in themſelves are neither good nor evil; but become the one or the other from the uſe

made of them. Our Saviour, who knew their certain influence, upon the corrupt heart of man; here calls them deceitful; becauſe they ſmile in our faces, yet pierce our nobleſt intereſts. They choak the word by ſubſtituting the ſhadow for the ſubſtance. Thus the young man in the Goſpel, choſe rather to turn from following Chriſt, than part with his great poſſeſſions. Though from its being ſaid, that Jeſus loved him, the ſuppoſition hath always pleaſed me, that in ſome after period he embraced the truth, and died in the joys of it. Saith the Apoſtle; Demas hath forſaken me, having loved this preſent world. A greedineſs of wealth, abſorbs every generous feeling: and contracts every purpoſe to one baſe point: owing to which, Iſaiah crys,—woe unto them that join houſe to houſe, that lay field to field, yet are never ſatiated with enjoying, or acquiring. Achan at laſt is forced to acknowledge, I ſaw a wedge of gold and a goodly Babyloniſh garment, and I coveted them: in ſpite of an expreſs command to the contrary. Beſides, they are ſuch procurers of titles, honours, places, and reſpect, as inſenſibly ſteal on the mind, that once deteſted the very means, it afterwards purſued to acquire them. Am I a dog, ſays Naaman to the prophet, that I ſhould do ſuch acts of villainy? Like the dropſy by drinking, the curſed love of money grows by ſucceſs; without pauſing to enjoy, it hurries on the individual to higher exertions, and paints with

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the moſt bewitching colours, what is not yet poſſeſſed: always ſuppoſing, the fancied charm of reſt and happineſs to be in the ſum, or the eſtate, they are now ſtraining every nerve to ſecure, or purchaſe. To this darling notion, they make all other conſiderations bend: God,—Eternity,—the ſoul, Religion, and ſuch like, are totally neglected: —nay probably, every previous juſt ſentiment they may have entertained concerning theſe, are poſitively renounced, and every ſacred and juſt obligation trampled upon, in their path to the temple of Plutus. The infatuated mortals we deſcribe, turn from the poor man's complaint;—give a deaf ear to the widow's plaintive moan, and the injured orphan's feeble cry. Here the parent plundered by oppreſſion, armed with power, or veiled by law, and fraud; with a burſting heart, and faultering tongue, addreſſes his precious babes: —O ye more than one half of my ſoul! and have I lived to ſee you ſtripped of what ſhould in equity have been yours?—the child exclaims, and O my father, my mother, do I behold you in want, without being able to relieve you!—The affectionate wife,—the fond brother,—the amiable ſiſter and ſincere friend, abroad,—at home,—in cities,—towns and villages, may be heard complaining of thoſe, whom an inordinate deſire of riches, hath prompted to oppreſs. And there is a tribunal, at which, their complaints will be moſt minutely attended to. The poor are trod

upon, whereas the rich have many friends. From many dangers, power will protect; many crimes may be concealed by art and hypocriſy; and puniſhment by means of opulence be evaded; but where conſcience ariſes to reveal, and Omnipotence is preparing to avenge, guilt bluſhes through her maſk, and trembles behind her bulwarks. The very name of Nabob ſeems to claim reſpect, and how many of our countrymen under that appellation, loſt the pleaſure of inward peace and approbation, from the moment they acquired it? The wealth that is gotten by injuſtice, perhaps by murder, will ſooner or later be viewed with abhorrence,—taſted without reliſh, and parted with in deſpair. There are nevertheleſs numbers, who have ſaid to their equally unprincipled aſſociates, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cauſe. Let us ſwallow them up alive as the grave; and whole as thoſe that go down into the pit: We ſhall fill our houſes with ſpoil *. Hence even children have ſlain their parents, and thouſands have deſtroyed their relations and friends; for the ſake of money, jewels, lands, and crowns.

Again riches are deceitful, in that they deprive men of what is moſt truly valuable, both here and hereafter. They ſteal from men their time, and induce them to ſquander on ignoble purſuits, that,

* Prov. i. 11, 12, 13.

which

which ſhould be devoted to eternal concerns. Ye cannot ſerve God and Mammon, came from the lips of infallibility. Whoſoever loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him. After all, why ſhould we covet theſe golden toys? which promiſe what they cannot beſtow, and often when graſped the cloſeſt, make to themſelves eagles wings, and fly away. Security and ſafety is not in them; they profit not in the day of wrath; nor can ſilver or gold then deliver. Hence let us pray with Agur; Give us neither poverty nor riches; and if they increaſe, O may we never ſet our heart upon them, ſince it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

The Evangeliſt Mark in narrating this parable, adds on this part of the explication, "and the luſts of other things entering in," which doubtleſs means, what Luke calls the pleaſures of this life, ariſing from the indulgence of irregular deſires, of whatever kind. All the ſcenes of ſplendour that dazzle the eye, all the ſoft ſounds of vice which captivate the ear, and all that pleaſes the taſte, are expreſly ranked among the thorns, which choke the word. Senſuality debaſes the nature of man, and yet many well acquainted with the tenets of Chriſtianity, and frequently deeply affected with its exerciſes, are at the ſame time ſlaves to luſt. Things innocent in themſelves, by being carried to exceſs, become criminal; which we

would do well deeply to ponder, as there are few, if any, who in ſome reſpects are not more or leſs chargeable with this. What a giddy circle do numbers run, and ſtill confeſs the object in view, is not a whit the nearer, than it was apparently, when firſt they ſtarted? Of all other characters alſo, they are the ſooneſt diſquieted. The moſt trifling occurrences, are ſufficient to alarm the conſcience of a man on ill terms with himſelf; and he often derives a ſecret pain and horror, from little circumſtances, which others do not obſerve; or obſerve without the leaſt emotion. There is an innate reſpect for virtue in the human breaſt. The love of pleaſure, to whatever point in folly's circle it diverges, and however faſhionable be the name it bears, warps the ſoul from the princples of rectitude and piety. Thus the word of truth is choked, and the wretched individuals, become unfruitful in the work of the Lord.

Verſe 23d. *But he that received ſeed into the good ground, is he, that heareth the word, and underſtandeth it, which alſo beareth fruit, and bringeth forth ſome an hundred fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty.*

The expoſition according to Luke ſtill ſtrengthens the above, or rather illuſtrates it, by calling them:—thoſe who in an honeſt and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The pages of inſpiration have told us, that the human heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately

perately wicked: wherefore, by a good and honeſt heart, we muſt underſtand, an amended and improving heart. Not vainly puffed up, but tender and contrite, willing to ſuffer, did Providence require it, the loſs of all things for the excellency of the knowledge of Jeſus Chriſt. By the phraſe before us, we are to conceive the following qualities as eſſentials. It is a faithful and a believing heart, rejoicing in Chriſt Jeſus, and having no confidence in the fleſh, but labouring to baffle the allurements thereof, and to act up to the duties of its holy vocation. Obedience neceſſarily ſprings from an evangelical faith. It is moreover a jealous heart, over its own pretenſions, taking great heed, leſt it be not right with God, for ever crying out: —Search me, O Lord, and know my heart, make me ſound in thy ſtatutes, that I may never be aſhamed. All which is the work of Divine Grace, and muſt be aſcribed alone to him, whoſe prerogative it is, to create a clean heart, and to renew a right ſpirit within us.

It is firſt ſaid of the true Chriſtian, that he hears the word, which though to multitudes it be the ſavour of death unto death; is nevertheleſs to ſome, the ſavour of life unto life. The Almighty ſaith by the mouth of Iſaiah, My word that goeth forth out of my mouth, ſhall not return unto me void: but it ſhall accompliſh that which I pleaſe,

and

and it ſhall proſper in the thing whereto I ſent it *. Thoſe in whom this gracious promiſe will be verified, hear the Goſpel to very different purpoſes, from what others do, and from what they themſelves formerly did. They hear it with attention, candour, meekneſs, and ſimplicity.

It is alſo ſaid of them they underſtand it, which is not attributed to any of the former claſſes. Tell an enthuſiaſt or a bigot, he doth not underſtand religion,—he ſmiles at you,—pities you,—or thunders out an Anathema againſt you, for daring to ſuppoſe ſuch a thing. He has got far beyond all that, into a ſomething which lulls his mind to reſt; and leſt he loſe the ſoothing ideas, avoids deſcending to ſolid reaſoning, in order to ſhew, as he vainly imagines, that he actually doth underſtand the matter. If it be dangerous to mix Chriſtian zeal with human paſſions; it muſt be much more ſo, to ſubſtitute the latter in place of the former, as hath too often happened among Chriſtians, of whom many have perſuaded themſelves, that they were defending the cauſe of Chriſt, while they were only gratifying their own anger, hatred, envy, covetouſneſs, ambition, and the like vices. The knowledge of a genuine Chriſtian is experimental and practical; more the work of the heart, than the head. There, it hath its beginning, progreſs, and completion. The intelligent hearers of the

* Iſ. lv. 11.

word, chearfully ſell all they have to purchaſe this pearl of great price:—even a ſaving acquaintance with Goſpel truth. To them its diſtinguiſhing doctrines appear rational, and in the moſt amiable point of view:—perfectly conſiſtent,—rich beyond expreſſion,—moſt beautifully ſimple,—majeſtically grand,—and exquiſitely calculated to promote the glory of God, and the higheſt intereſts of men. What ſeems fooliſhneſs to the Greek, to the Jew a ſtumbling block, and to the unregenerate a matter of no moment, appears to them the power and the wiſdom of God. He indeed, who deſerves the name of an intelligent hearer, like Mary, abſtracted from the world, ſits at the feet of Jeſus, at the ſame time poſſeſſing all Martha's aſſiduity, in practice to pleaſe. Leſs than this will not do, for all the endeavours of the Ambaſſadors of Chriſt, and all the diſpenſations of the word or Providence, will only ſerve to aggrandize our condemnation, if we mingle our own vain conceits, with the word of the kingdom, or do not imbibe its real ſpirit.

The ſincere hearers of the Goſpel keep it:—not but that to a certain degree there might be ſtones even in that good ground, here a weed—and there a thorn: ſince perfection below the ſtars dwell only in the written word, nor can by man be attained on this ſide the grave. All implied is, that there was none to choke it, or able to divert them from following on to know the Lord: growing daily

daily in grace, and in all religious practice. Muſt not the man who has received the truth in the love of it, and who hath no other ground of hope, reſpecting eternity, refuſe to part with this good word of the grace of God? Far ſooner would he renounce his deareſt temporal enjoyments, yea, even life itſelf.

By the evangeliſt Luke's uſing the word patience, we apprehend the gradual progreſs of religion in the heart is intimated; together with the oppoſition made to it from various quarters, and the reſolution, ſelf-denial, and perſeverance neceſſary to the Chriſtian character. It is a conſiderable time before the ſeed vegetates, riſes into the ſtalk and ear; and ripens into fruit. It uſually meets with many checks in its progreſs, yet not more than the individual meets with, who prefers religion to all other conſiderations. The Apoſtle ſays, Behold the huſbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain *. In like manner, let us without fretfulneſs, patiently wait for the accompliſhment of his promiſes, knowing that to thoſe acting thus, he who is the Lord our righteouſneſs, ſhall appear for our compleat redemption.

Fruitfulneſs is the grand characteriſtic of Chriſtians, and the ſureſt way to aſcertain their real

* James, v. 7.

merit;

merit: in a word, to diſtinguiſh them from others, as well as among themſelves. An obſervation pertinent enough occurs; namely; the ſmall number, comparatively ſpeaking, of thoſe who are diſciples of Jeſus in truth and ſincerity. What multitudes are at no pains even to preſerve the decent appearance of religion; and among thoſe who do, how many alas are there with whom it is appearance only. They are way-ſide hearers, who underſtand it not; or ſtony ground hearers, who having no root in themſelves, the ſeed ſown dies for want of moiſture, or the refreſhing influences of religious exerciſes, and of the word and ſpirit of God. It alſo dies for want of earth, or a true underſtanding in ſpiritual matters. Where there is ignorance, there muſt be barrenneſs. Among thoſe whoſe affections are caſually moved, and whoſe judgments are by no means uninformed; how frequently do the cares of the world, the deceitfulneſs of riches, and the luſts of other things, abſorb every impreſſion it makes. Of thoſe who hear, and improve to their preſent peace, and future happineſs; our Redeemer hath expreſsly ſaid: By their fruits ye ſhall know them. And he hath farther aſſured us, that we cannot bring forth fruit, unleſs we abide in him, ſteadily adhering to his doctrine, and uniformly copying his example. Profeſſions, whether moral or religious, are indiſcriminating things; the criterion in both caſes ever muſt be, the tenor of conduct purſued. In part,

not

not altogether, can men conceal their principles. Therefore we are not required, nor ought we to account any as companions on the heavenly road, or as fellow-workers with us, unleſs we are perfectly ſatisfied, that their views are ſimilar to our own, ſo far as regards integrity and conſcience: though their articles be ever ſo diſſimilar. The bloſſoms of genuine goodneſs will ſweetly perfume, and adorn the character of thoſe, in whoſe hearts virtue is rooted.

The being fruitful hearers, is the beſt foundation of religious hope. They alluded to in the verſe before us, are not contented with ſudden flaſhes of affection, or occaſional exertions of philanthropy: but ſtudy to approve themſelves his faithful diſciples, by being holy as he was holy, in heart and life. Uniform as well as univerſal muſt that obedience be, which will meet with the final approbation of the Great Judge. In the Chriſtian life, if we are not gaining ground, we are loſing it. And that profeſſor, hath great reaſon to ſuſpect his integrity in religion, who does not in ſome meaſure diſcern his progreſs. Does not the huſbandman ſuſpect the vitality? or in other words, the root of the tree, which neither buds nor bloſſoms. The worthy hearers of the Goſpel, aware of this being their ſtate of probation, have their converſation in Heaven, whence they look for the ſecond glorious appearance of their God and Saviour, and their virtues ſhine brighter

brighter and brighter, as they draw nearer to everlaſting day. Placed in whatever part of the Chriſtian field they be, they may meet with ſtorms from unexpected quarters; yet through the ſtrength of him that loved them, amidſt all, they flouriſh in piety, and grow in uſefulneſs.

They are not all alike fruitful: ſome an hundred, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty. Every good ſoil, in conſequence of a variety in the mold, produces not alike, nor is fitted for every grain, neither does every honeſt heart. A man may be truly acceptable in the eyes of his Maker, though he brings not forth fruit, in the ſame proportion as others, or even the ſame kind of fruit. The gradation eſtabliſhed among the works of God in the univerſe, takes place, in his family of adopted ſons through Jeſus Chriſt. Some are old and full grown;—numbers are manly and ſtrong;—many weak and delicate;—and ſome but babes: while all have the ſame Omnipotent Father, and equally ſhare a parent's love. We admit, in proportion to theſe differences, ſhall their lots of the inheritance be. To one, God hath given ten talents, to another five, to another one; but whoſoever improveth aright what he has got, ſhall never come into condemnation. The Crown of every ſincere Chriſtian, or faithful adorer of the Supreme Majeſty, whatever be his ideas or his denomination, ſhall be as weighty as he can bear; and his happineſs adequate to the moſt enlarged capacities of his

his ſoul. But let not this, while it prevents our deſpondency, check our ambition; to qualify ourſelves, as much as we can, for the higheſt honours of the ſaints. Were we at greater pains in this point, the more would be our attainments. It were eaſy to ſhew, that the ſincere hearer of the word of God, is a better citizen,—a better huſband,—maſter,—friend,—and ſo on, which hath been happily executed by an amiable Divine of the preſent day, whoſe treatiſe on this parable I peruſed with pleaſure, and would have been induced to drop my intention, had I not delivered my ſentiments on the ſubject twenty years ago, to the ſatisfaction of many.

Having thus explained the parable as interpreted by our Bleſſed Lord, and therewith mingled ſeveral practical remarks, little ſhall now ſuffice. The huſbandman expects a return. Where God hath ſown, he means to demand an account. What, ye infatuated mortals, will be your fate! if through your negligence and worldly-mindedneſs, thorns prevent the ſeed from ſpringing up? Can you reaſonably flatter yourſelves with being among thoſe, who bringing back their ſheaves ſhall ſhout the ſpiritual harveſt home, and in the plenitude of glory, enter the heavenly Zion. To uſe the language of the Pſalmiſt, the lines that have fallen unto us, both in grace and in Providence, have been in pleaſant places, the ſeed hath been

been plentifully ſown:—That we dare not deny. But pitiful returns we have made. No earthly huſbandman, would have deigned the leaſt attention, or beſtowed the moſt trivial expence, on a ſoil ſo barren, as what our ſouls have been, under the kindeſt viſitations of the Parent of the Univerſe. Let us not deceive ourſelves, for we cannot him, with whom we have to do, by imagining a part, will be accepted for the whole. Divided affections, evidently imply weakneſs in our religious principles; and if our Redeemer have not the whole heart, he will have none of us. Our attendance upon religious inſtitutions;—our belief of the general evidences of Chriſtianity, unleſs we cordially embrace its contents, and walk under the influence of its precepts, will only add fuel to our future torment. In vain have we been baptized; in vain have we prayed, wept, and communicated; —in vain have we meditated; —reſolved, and vowed, if the world hath been always the idol of our heart,—its baubles pleaſing,—and its diſtinctions ſatisfactory. How emphatically doth the Scripture ſpeak of their ſtate, whoſe goodneſs hath been like the morning cloud, and their boaſted piety, like the early dew? Do we glory in the Chriſtian name, and ſit under the light of the Goſpel, faithfully preached, and in the moſt animating manner, enforced upon our conſciences? yet never have examined its particular ſucceſs in our ſouls, and effects upon our converſations.

God pity them, who are ſtill unable to tell, what claſs of hearers they belong to. O miſerable mortals! how long ſhall your injudicious reflections, diſqualify you for the perception of Divine truth!—How long ſhall preſent objects render you inattentive to futurity? What ſhall I ſay to you, who have hitherto been but way-ſide hearers? May God by his ſpirit ſpeak to you! And as for you who hear with joy, yet having no root, immediately repair to your much-loved follies; conſider, that awful fiat, Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone. What if God ſhould ſay it of you? In the cares of this world, and the deceitfulneſs of riches there is treaſon. Deluded mortals, who are totally immerſed in the former, or elated by the latter, without an alteration in your practice, they will ruin you.

As for the fruitful hearers be perſuaded, to go on in the ſtrength of the Lord; and though thirty be your preſent produce, you may yet bring forth an hundred-fold. Take care, that nothing offend you, at the word of the kingdom. Let not the decayed beauties, and ſpecious proſpects of this ſtrange land, ever make your native home: or for a moment, weaken your attempts, to reach your kindred ſkies. Let not your paſſions, counteract your ſentiments of virtue. Be perſuaded, you will beſt diſcharge your duty to men, when you are the moſt mindful of that, you owe to your God. Be not the hearers of the word, but the doers

doers of it alſo. Lay it up in hearts diſpoſed to goodneſs, and panting for higher intellectual improvements. Is this ſtudy your delight? then bleſſed are ye of the Lord, for ye ſhall reſt in your graves, and your labours of love ſhall follow you. Be this each of our caſes, through the merits of Jeſus Chriſt, to whom with the Father, and bleſſed Spirit, be endleſs praiſe, for ever and ever. Amen, and Amen.

EXPOSITION VI.

LUKE XV. from the 11th Verſe to the End.

And he ſaid, A certain man had two ſons: And the younger of them ſaid to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. And not many days after, the younger ſon gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there waſted his ſubſtance with riotous living. And when he had ſpent all, there aroſe a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himſelf to a citizen of that country, and he ſent him into his fields to feed ſwine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the huſks that the ſwine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himſelf, he ſaid, How many hired ſervants of my father's have bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger! I will ariſe, and go to my father, and will ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon: make me as one of thy hired ſervants. And he aroſe, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father ſaw him, and had compaſſion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kiſſed him. And the ſon ſaid unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt heaven, and in thy ſight, and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon, But the father ſaid to his ſervants, Bring forth the beſt robe, and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand, and ſhoes on *his* feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat and be merry. For this my ſon was dead, and is alive again; he was loſt, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder ſon was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the houſe, he heard muſick and dancing. And he called one of the ſervants, and aſked what theſe things meant. And he ſaid unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, becauſe he hath received him ſafe and ſound. And he was angry, and would not go in:

therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he anſwering, ſaid to *his* father, Lo, theſe many years do I ſerve thee, neither tranſgreſſed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gaveſt me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; But as ſoon as this thy ſon was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou haſt killed for him the fatted calf. And he ſaid unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we ſhould make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was loſt, and is found.

FEW places in Scripture, have been ſo much conſidered by writers and preachers, as the one now read; and let us hope, that what hath been wrote on it, or ſaid from it, hath afforded comfort to the truly penitent, by encouraging them to return to the Lord, who will have mercy on them, and to their God, who will abundantly pardon. We own the import of this parable, to be the ſame with that of the two preceding ones, narrated in the chapter, though we reject, as too far ſtretched, the fanciful reaſons, which ſome have aſſigned for this, and ſeveral of the things they imagine couched in them.

The ſcope of the parable is, to rebuke the pride and arrogancy of the Phariſees; who overvalued their legal obſervances, and reflected upon our Lord, for keeping company with, and ſhewing ſuch marks of regard to publicans and ſinners. It exhibits the natural condition of mankind, their wilful departure, from the ſervice of the Author, of every good and perfect gift; to forſake whom implies, loving the road that leads to the chambers

of

of death. It magnifies the unbounded compaſſion, ſhewn by the Father to true penitents, who have recourſe to his divine mercy, through faith in the Son. It expoſes the envy of the Scribes and Phariſees, at the idea of ſalvation's being preached to the Gentiles, or to thoſe in whoſe lives, glaring immoralities had been manifeſt. Such ſalvation they themſelves refuſed, and ſeem vexed, that others received.

Verſe 11th. *And he ſaid, A certain man had two ſons.*

By the certain man, the Almighty is meant; but who by the two ſons, is a point, whereon Expoſitors have not been unanimous. Permit us to reject the notion, that angels are intended by the elder, and men by the younger: angels are called ſons of God;—by Creation are older than men, and of good ones, who kept their firſt ſtate, it may be ſaid, they have not tranſgreſſed his commands; yet they are never called the brethren of men. Inſtead of being angry at the return of ſinners, it is expreſsly affirmed they rejoice.

Neither do we think, the parable ought to be limited to the Jews or Gentiles. The firſt are older, reſpecting external privileges, and the Gentiles the younger; becauſe they were later brought into the family of God; after having ſpent their ſubſtance, in idolatry and wickedneſs. All this however makes the parable premature; of courſe inapplicable. It appears therefore ſafeſt to con-

clude; that by the elder is meant the Scribes and Phariſees among the Jews, and all ſelf-righteous perſons in whatever age or clime; and by the younger, the publicans and ſinners among the Jews, or any other nation; who think on their former ways, and wiſely turn from the evil and practice of them.

Verſe 12th. *And the younger of them ſaid to his father, Father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.*

Youth is for the moſt part wavering and imprudent. Ere his lips could thus undutifully accoſt his parent; his heart had revolted againſt his authority. Thinking himſelf qualified to manage his own concerns, he longed to be free from thoſe reſtraints, which a father's houſe, and eye implied. Advice was irkſome to him, ſeeing he apprehended he needed it not.

" Give me, ſaid he, the portion of goods that " falleth to me."

The Inconſiderate, deſire a preſent portion; neither regarding their ſouls, nor futurity, and the Almighty in anger frequently grants them their requeſt. Hence the Pſalmiſt tells us, the wicked have their portion in this life; and our Saviour ſaid of the rich, that they received their conſolation. To the Jews the Supreme Being, their Father by creation, by providential care and adoption, had divided ſpecial gifts;—and privileges, with worldly goods,—the two laſt in ſuperabundance. God is kind

kind even to the evil and unthankful, in giving life and neceſſaries. In the caſe before us, had not the dividend rather exceeded, the young man would have complained. His ſilence indicates ſatisfaction. Perhaps parental love ſhone in the diviſion, which ought to have altered his purpoſe, and endeared his father's houſe to him.

Verſe 13th. *And not many days after, the younger ſon gathered all together; and took his journey into a far country, and there waſted his ſubſtance with riotous living.*

Mark, why he wiſhed for his portion, not that by prudence and induſtry he might augment it, but to loiter in idleneſs, and expend it in criminal indulgences. Dreading reproaches, which his own feelings would avow to be juſt; he ſets out for a diſtant clime, full of the ideas of pleaſure ariſing from novelty, and no controul. To ſimilar views, how many young men owe their ruin? The loſs of parents is not ſo ſevere to children, as when they have reared them, in the paths of virtue for a while, and are taken from them, juſt when their moral character may be fixed, and their public uſefulneſs determined. Then vice under ſome ſpecious ſhape creeps in;—obliterates the good impreſſions, which early culture had ſtamped, and leads them on inſenſibly, till they have loſt the ſtrength of mind, requiſite for reformation:—finally conſigning them over to the bittereſt remorſe. To run from parents, at the period when their

their counſel may prove moſt ſalutary, is only to accelerate deſtruction. Yet, ſo impatient was this unhappy youth to be gone, that he ſtaid not many days, probably not one more than was ſufficient to equip him, after he had got his patrimony, which from its being conſiderable, he idly dreamed would laſt for ever.

Religiouſly taken, what a picture is this of the human heart? How many endued with excellent talents, and having rare degrees of knowledge, turn them againſt the Giver, by throwing contempt, on his works of providence, or grace. Inſtead of acknowledging continual dependance on God, they ſet out for ſcenes of imaginary bliſs,—even ſaying to the Father of Mercies, Let me alone,—we have no deſire to live under thy minute inſpection. Thy laws we love not. They fly from his houſe, and the duties of it, to the regions of ſin, which are far from the dignity of human nature, and farther ſtill from the infinite purity of the Deity. Though none can fly from the power or preſence of God, yet all voluntary tranſgreſſion of his laws, is a moral departure from him. In proportion as the ſinner proceeds, the greater is his diſtance from the ſource of beatitude. What a chaſm does that imply? To what inexpreſſible anguiſh doth it lead? Shall the throne of iniquity, ſaith the Pſalmiſt, have fellowſhip with thee? No inward ſuggeſtion is attended to,—no advice, however faithfully and tenderly given, is embraced with cordiality.

cordiality. The habits of vice have incapacitated them, from diſcharging any acceptable worſhip to God; for the very prayers of the wicked, are ſaid to be an abomination unto him. All this guilt they muſt anſwer for, ſeeing it is their own choice.

"He went into a far country." Doubtleſs his father wiſhed his ſtay, while he left him to the freedom of his own will. My people would not hearken, Iſrael would have none of me, is a tender expoſtulation, uſed by the Parent of the Univerſe.

We are next informed, he waſted his ſubſtance with riotous living. Many paid attention to him —courted his acquaintance, pretended the warmeſt friendſhip for him,—and the pleaſure it would give them to ſerve him. They found wit and humour in his converſation, paid deference to his judgment; praiſed his taſte, and were proud of his approbation. Baſe Diſſemblers!—ill-fated youth!—'tis thy wine they reliſh, and thy table which they covet; when theſe are gone, they will be the firſt to tell thee, they ſaw where it would end, and dreaded the miſery, to which thy prodigality would lead. The very harlots which ſhared thy bounty, will inſult thy diſtreſs. Now they pretend they cannot live without thee; nor be happy ſave in thy ſmile. Thus ſinners waſte their time in forbidden purſuits; till Nebuchadnezzar like, they loſe the very uſe of reaſon, and reſpecting the concerns of another world, act like fools, or madmen.

Verſe

Verſe 14th. *And when he had ſpent all, there aroſe a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want.*

Without prudence and œconomy, the greateſt fortunes melt away. This youth dreamt not of poverty, till it ſtared him in the face. Or, if in ſome reflecting moments, the idea ſtruck him, it was ſo painful, that rather than guard againſt it, he plunged into exceſſes, which brought it the faſter upon him. There is in human nature a propenſity to extremes. There have been, and now are, individuals with large fortunes, one twentieth part of which they expend not, who will gravely tell you, they are afraid of coming to the work-houſe, and grudge every ſixpence they pay. This indicates a meanneſs of ſoul, which abſolutely ſinks them beneath our pity.

We are told, there aroſe a mighty famine in that land, which according to ſome writers implies, a public diſtreſs; which the Almighty literally brought on him, and the whole country. Vice perſiſted in, brings men to a ſtarving condition: and divine judgments, frequently overtake the ſinner, in a great degree, on this ſide the grave. How many have lived to want that, for their own neceſſities, which in the days of affluence, they were at pains to waſte?

Nor are the pleaſures of ſin, but for a ſeaſon. Providence can ſoon embitter all its ſhort-lived enjoyments. By the mighty famine, may be underſtood,

derſtood, ſtrong convictions, and dread of future puniſhment, creating unuſual perturbation, as in Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas. Many from ſimilar cauſes, are ſtopt for a time in their evil courſes: who nevertheleſs fall ſhort of the character of true penitents. How deplorable is their caſe, to whom after their neglect of all means of improvement, the heavens are as braſs, and the earth as iron?

"He began to be in want." Doubly ſevere muſt poverty be to thoſe, who have brought it on themſelves, by their own imprudence. The vicious man is in want of every thing truly good:—of wiſdom and knowledge; of grace and holineſs.

Verſe 15th. *And he went, and joined himſelf to a citizen of that country, and he ſent him into his fields, to feed ſwine.*

Alas! to what wretched expedients doth diſſipation reduce! Where are the ſycophants now that flocked to him in his days of plenty?—They are fled with the power he had of entertaining them, and pay their wonted incenſe of mean adulation, to the perſon, on whom they hope that power hath reſted. Added to the other miſeries under which he labours, it is none of the ſmalleſt, to be ſhunned, perhaps vilified by thoſe cormorants, who devoured his eſtate. Mark alſo, a juſt judgment on the raſh and diſobedient. He that ſpurned the authority of a loving father, whoſe tenderneſs would have overlooked many errors, muſt pay an immediate obedience to the ſtern command,—muſt

dread

dread the frown,—and bear the cutting checks of an unkind ſtranger. He who undervalued the dignity of a ſon, is a ſervant of the loweſt order, being compelled to feed ſwine, the dirtieſt of brutes. He that murmured under the bleſſings of plenty, is now better taught, by the rigours of extreme want.

Satan is ſuppoſed the chief citizen in the regions of unrighteouſneſs; who hath baits adapted to every palate, and ſhewn in the moſt alluring manner. He hath alſo various kinds of work, for thoſe who adhere to him. That ſubtle adverſary, perceiving him alarmed with a ſenſe of his danger, tries by various ſuggeſtions to divert his thoughts. Every time the vicious man yields to the force of his habits, he renews his covenant with death and hell; and when any thing diſſimilar to this takes place, the Accuſer of mankind, uſes every device afreſh to entrap them. Thus he ſent Cain to build cities, and induced Felix to diſmiſs Paul: and from the contracted habits of ſenſuality, which this poor wretch had, he ſent him to feed ſwine. By the field we conceive is adumbrated the exceſſive number of thoſe, who make proviſion for the luſts of the fleſh; they are fields neither plowed up nor ſown. The abandoned and profane, whether male or female, in every age or clime, are Satan's ſwine. Before which characters, our Redeemer cautioned his faithful followers by no means, to caſt their pearls. It is not more natural for ſwine to

grovel in the mire, were they waſhed ever ſo clean, than for the mere profeſſor, however reclaimed in ſome groſſer acts, ſubjecting to ſevere cenſure among men, to indulge in ſecret; nor can emancipate themſelves from the vileſt ſlavery. Swine feed on acorns, but never look up to the oak whence they fall; ſo wicked men feed on the bounties of Providence, without regarding the Infinite Source.

From the phraſe we may farther imagine, that he became a prey to low, baſe company; than which there is not a more dangerous ſnare to youth, or greater obſtacle to virtue. How many eaſy, unſuſpecting tempers have been ſlain by this? The ſlighteſt violations of truth and propriety, may terminate in the moſt aggravated guilt. Each baſer paſſion was his maſter, and every inordinate appetite he gratified; thinking to allay thoſe pangs he felt, from the conſciouſneſs of his paſt behaviour. Such a ſtep for a while deadens the remorſe, and appears to wear convictions away. How contemptible is the ſervice of ſin? Who but fools would deign to feed on huſks?

Verſe 16th. *And he would fain have filled his belly with the huſks, that the ſwine did eat, and no man gave unto him.*

According to the words literally taken, by huſks ſome underſtand ſiliquæ, or pods of pulſe, peas, or beans. The Syriac verſion interprets it to be the

the fruit of the Charob tree, which the Jews ſay, was the food of beaſts, and alſo of men. It beareth a pleaſant fruit in pods,—was much known in Nicea,—and to thoſe dwelling by the ſea of Liguria, where children, and even hogs frequently fed promiſcuouſly upon it. Many apprehend, the fruit of that tree, was John the Baptiſt's bread.

What a change in this young man's ſtate? He wanted the neceſſaries of life:—ſo that when the ſwine had meſſes given them, he could willingly have ſubmitted to partake, even from their trough. "But no man gave unto him." The maſter he ſerved, like many miſerly one's of the preſent day, was more intent on adding to his wealth, than feeding his ſervants. The leſs he could keep them on, was ſaving a trifle; and the more he gave the hogs, would, he hoped, turn out more to his advantage. Here we nevertheleſs often ſee the finger of God, ſcattering that which is got by depriving our fellow-creatures of their duty; and proving, that unjuſt gains cannot ultimately be beneficial. This conſtruction, though it differs from all the commentators I have ſeen, appears to me the propereſt from the words.

Reſpecting the ſpiritual meaning, give me leave to notice a diverſity of opinion, between two well known Expoſitors, who followed in immediate ſucceſſion, in the ſame paſtoral charge. Could that be the reaſon, why the laſt occaſionally tries all

all the plauſibility of reaſoning, and plunges into the miſts of allegory, to find a meaning different from his predeceſſor?

By huſks the firſt underſtands the vanities of this world, as riches, honours, and pleaſures. No ſuch thing, ſays his ſucceſſor. Theſe objects of his deſire he had already lived upon, and ſpent all his ſubſtance in the purſuit and enjoyment of them. Now he felt the bitterneſs of their fruits, and eagerly longed for ſome food, more adequate to his immortal part:—wherefore by huſks he thinks are meant, works of righteouſneſs done by men, in that they neither pleaſe God, nor ſatisfy the demands of his law: not being performed from a right principle; of courſe, have no merit in them, and are mere traſh, compared with the deeds that ſpring from a living faith. Is not this going a long way about, to have a ſtroke at an Arminian? Why may not both be right upon the whole, and the difference lie rather in words, than in truth? He had expected to find ſatisfaction in the practice of vice, wherein he was diſappointed. The Spirit of Holy Inſpiration ſays, They ſhall caſt their ſilver in the ſtreets, and their gold ſhall be removed, their ſilver and their gold ſhall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they ſhall not ſatisfy their ſouls, neither fill their bowels, becauſe it is the ſtumbling block of their iniquity *. The entertainments of ſenſe, neither

* Ezek. vii. 19.

ſuit our natures, nor ſupply our wants. He that reſts on them, feeds on wind; and claſſes with him ſo juſtly called a fool, who could bid his ſoul be at eaſe, becauſe he had got abundance of riches. God alone is the proper object of the ſoul, in the contemplation of whoſe perfections and works; in the reſemblance to whoſe character, and enjoyment of whoſe favour, it can have real and permanent pleaſure.

Another reaſon, beſides the one already aſſigned, why no man gave unto him, might be, that in his days of profligacy, he perhaps was inſulting in his manners, which would ſteel many againſt him, who would conſider his fall as deſerved. Others from a native illiberality of ſoul, would not pity him, becauſe he had brought theſe miſeries on himſelf. Great God, where did they learn ſuch principles? Not ſure from the mild tenets of thy pure Religion, O thou compaſſionate Saviour, nor from thy practice, ſeeing tho' Jeruſalem had killed the prophets, and ſtoned them, who were ſent to reclaim her:—Thou ſhed precious tears of ſofteſt humanity, over her blindneſs and obſtinacy. We grant thoſe who are in diſtreſs, owing to the unforeſeen and unavoidable viciſſitudes in life, claim our primary regard, and that in the ratio of their proximity to us, or their integrity; while we aſſert, that it is ungenerous and unchriſtian to refuſe relief, if in our power, to thoſe in need, be the cauſe what it may.

Verſe

Verſe 17th. *And when he came to himſelf, he ſaid—How many hired ſervants of my Father's, have bread enough and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger?*

As his wants continued, his ſerious reflections increaſed. While his troubles were on him, his ſorrows could not abate: nay they gathered ſtrength, till they brought him to reaſon; a conſiderable ſtep towards his father's houſe. The profligate not only declares, but glories in his ſin, which none in their ſober ſenſes would do. Neceſſity brought the prodigal to ſound thinking. The Apoſtle Paul gives it as a mark of ſinners, that their underſtandings are darkened. Nor does he conceal it, when applied to himſelf, in his unregenerate ſtate. Being exceeding mad againſt them, I perſecuted them even unto ſtrange cities *. Madmen cannot judge of the nature of things, of times and characters. In like manner, ſinners are blind to the beauties of virtue, know not the value of time, or the importance of eternity; they walk in a vain ſhew, and ſay of thoſe, whoſe friendſhip might be of the higheſt ſervice to them, as Ahab did to Elijah,—Haſt thou found me, O mine enemy?

When the Prodigal was at the laſt extremity, then he thought of his father's houſe. All afflictions are not ſanctified, but when they are, they prove happy means of turning ſinners from the

* Acts xxvi. 11.

error of their ways. By them the ear is opened to diſcipline, and the heart diſpoſed to receive inſtruction. When we from experience declare concerning all worldly objects, what Job did of his friends, miſerable comforters are ye all, then we are prompted to apply to the Great Comforter, who was ſent to convince the world of ſin. Conſideration is the firſt ſtep of evangelical repentance, and by the prophet Haggai, is twice in one chapter inforced upon the children of Iſrael. Thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, Conſider your ways. David, in the 119th pſalm, confeſſes it was his firſt ſtep. I thought, ſays he, upon my former ways, then turned to thy teſtimonies. To conſider in this ſenſe, is to examine, with minuteneſs and impartiality our conduct; compare our duty with our practice, ſurvey the conſequences, and for the future to act and determine on theſe grounds. Evangelical repentance is, when a perſon hates vice on its own account,—bitterly laments the part he hath acted,—confeſſes to the Lord,—and directly forſakes it. All theſe appear in the conduct of the prodigal. By hired ſervants, ſome underſtand the Scribes and Phariſees; or thoſe mercenaries, who work only for the earthly rewards. The Jews, in this ſenſe, had bread enough, and to ſpare: but wanted eyes to ſee it, and faith to feed upon it. There are other Expoſitors who imagine, that the requeſt in this point of view, would not be compatible with his humility.

May

May not the words therefore allude, ſimply, to the loweſt in the rank of Chriſtians, whoſe faith may be weak, and their conſolations ſmall; yet poſſeſſed of ſincerity, and warm deſires after greater degrees of virtue, are far ſuperior to thoſe, who under no ſenſible diſtreſs, apprehend they have no wants.

And I, ſays the Prodigal, periſh with hunger in this diſtant clime, to which imprudence carried me, and folly deluged me with its conſequences. The conſcience may by adverſe circumſtances be alarmed, without any proper effect: being ſtifled in their energy by other temptations, and by the mind's flying to equally vain and illicit purſuits. To render them effectual, needs the operation of the Bleſſed Spirit, clearly to point out the remedy and the malady; and lead to the phyſician, while it accurately deſcribes the diſeaſe.

Verſe 18th. *I will ariſe, and go to my Father, and will ſay unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt heaven, and before thee.*

Light now breaks in upon his judgment, and reaſon reſumes her ſway. If I ſtay here, I muſt infallibly periſh; ſhould my father reject me, I can be no worſe, and it will pleaſe me, to have made the beſt attempt to better my condition. So reaſoned the lepers before the gates of Samaria, and the event juſtified the choice they made. Perhaps he did not altogether lothe his vices, while

the means of indulgence were left; but ſince theſe were gone, he had ſuffered enough to make him deteſt them. Still he was in the country, which he prudently reſolves to leave, that there might neither be the acquaintance, or occurrences to tempt him afreſh. This moment will I rouze from my deſpondency, and repair, not to my brother, whoſe heart might eſpouſe my cauſe: to my relations, whoſe feelings might induce them to commiſerate me:—or to ſervants, who might put me in the way of ſeeing my father; but to himſelf. I'll go and call him father ſtill. Moſt humbly will I own my treſpaſs againſt Heaven, which hath by poſitive precept, as well as in our nature, enjoined obedience to parents; and before him, whoſe houſe I ought to have preferred to all others, and been content to live under the admonitions of his tenderneſs, enjoying the dictates of his ſuperior wiſdom.

Thus the true penitent deſpairing of relief, from all ſecondary cauſes, goes directly to the Father of mercies, whoſe exuberant goodneſs hath no limits. With an intention to call him Father, whom he hath ſo highly offended, he ſets out homewards. Truſt in the divine promiſes, fires his zeal along the road. He longs for the comforts, which are only in the houſe, and family of God. He tries to gain, by earneſt ſupplication, what he had forfeited. In bitterneſs of ſoul he cries! O thou immutable being, though I have forgotten the duty of

of a ſon, condeſcend to regard me with a parent's love. If thou, Lord, ſhouldſt mark iniquity, O Lord, who ſhall ſtand? But there is forgiveneſs with thee, that thou mayeſt be feared. Againſt thee, thee only, have I done this thing, and in thy ſight. Thou knoweſt my down-ſitting and my up-riſing, thou underſtandeſt my thoughts afar off. Thou haſt ſet my iniquities before thee, my ſecret ſins in the light of thy countenance. Thou pondereſt all my paths, nay thou haſt written my ſins in a book, and they are before thee. With horror I look back on the ſins of my heart,—of my lips,—and of my life. How grievouſly have I offended againſt the cleareſt light of ſcripture, conſcience and reaſon? How many warnings have I neglected, and under innumerable inſtances of Providential goodneſs been unthankful?

Verſe 19th. *And am no more worthy to be called thy ſon, make me as one of thy hired ſervants.*

Aſhamed to ſee his father's face, yet panting for a ſmile, the deepeſt abaſement fills him. Thy ſon I was; mentioning the relation, ſuits not my preſent caſe, permit me only to live under thy roof. Make me as a hired ſervant, were it the door-keeper, that I may ſhew by my diligence in, and attachment to thy ſervice, how I prize the privileges, which once I ſlighted. Diſpoſe of me as thou wilt, only let me be thine.

The true penitent ſtands ſelf-condemned at the bar of conſcience;—at the bar of God's word:—in the preſence of Omniſcience, and yet ventures to plead the relation of a ſon, which the Almighty might refuſe to admit; on account of manifold revolts from him. Senſible of his unworthineſs, he claims nothing of merit, yet urges for mercy, to be in ſome degree freely beſtowed.

Verſe 20th. *And he aroſe, and came to his Father: But when he was yet a great way off, his Father ſaw him, and had compaſſion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kiſſed him.*

Every biaſs to what is good, ought to be religiouſly cheriſhed; ſince there are calls that will be repeated no more, and apoſtacies from which it is extremely difficult to return. The prodigal put his reſolves in immediate execution; aware of the danger of liſtening to the ſuggeſtions of ſenſe, adviſing him to adjourn the matter. He allowed no fatigue to diſcourage him,—no difficulty to deter him,—no allurement to ſeduce him,—and his perſeverance is ſooner rewarded, than he could have expected. When he was yet a great way off, the venerable old man ſaw him; for whom he had ſpent many a heavy hour,—many a ſigh,—many a prayer. He recognizes his long-loſt ſon, under all his rags, and however altered by hard labour, mean living, and what produces effects far more dreadful, inward remorſe. His boſom throbbed

at

at perceiving the change, yet ſcarce gave him time to think, how different his return was, to the ſtile in which he ſet out. Compaſſion filled his ſoul, and eagerneſs to expreſs it helped his ſpeed:—he ran.—Unhappy youth! What were thy feelings then!—He throws his arms around his neck,—preſſes him to a father's breaſt, and kiſſes him.

Hither turn your eyes, ye parents, who becauſe your children may have been fooliſh in ſome reſpects, or diſobedient in others, refuſe reconciliation ever after, which often drives them from evil to worſe, till deſtruction overwhelms both their temporal and ſpiritual concerns. If they repent, and ſubmit themſelves, what can they more? Ought not this to diſarm your ſeverity, and turn your harſhneſs into mildneſs? If you lock up the bowels of affection from your offſpring, ſo much on a par with yourſelves, what right have ye to aſk the Ruler of the Univerſe, to forgive you your treſpaſſes, eſpecially, if ye add, on the condition of your forgiving others?

In like manner, the true penitent having reſolved, begins to attend with ſerioufneſs on the means of grace. One thing, ſays David, have I deſired of the Lord, and that will I ſeek after. In this courſe he is graciouſly beheld, even when yet afar off. Chriſt ſaw Nathaniel under the fig-tree, we may depend upon it, he was not idle there. God ſees all the workings of our ſpirits, and all our endeavours

deavours after conformity to him. On the wings of love, which far outſtrip the wind, the Saviour flies to heal, where the terrors of the law hath wounded, and to create anew, what ſin had ſlain. An excellent writer on the parables, compares the acts of the Deity towards the penitent, to thoſe relative to the Prophet Iſaiah, who when he obtained that glorious viſion of infinite holineſs, and beheld his own vileneſs, concluded himſelf undone. Then flew one of the Seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from the altar, and laid it upon my mouth, and ſaid, Lo! this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away. No language can ſo well expreſs, the readineſs of the Almighty to receive all true penitents; as thoſe moving accents, which we have, I have ſurely heard Ephraim bemoaning himſelf thus; Thou haſt chaſtized me, and I was chaſtized: as a bullock unaccuſtomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I ſhall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented, and after that I was inſtructed, I ſmote upon my thigh, I was aſhamed, yea, even confounded, becauſe I did bear the reproach of my youth. Is Ephraim my dear ſon? Is he a pleaſant child? for ſince I ſpake againſt him, I do earneſtly remember him ſtill; therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will ſurely have mercy

mercy upon him, ſaith the Lord *. The ſoul receiving aſſiſtance from the ſource of all ſtrength, holds on its way, under ſingular apprehenſions, reſpecting the end, nor deems itſelf quite ſecure, till in a father's arms.

By the phraſe, he fell on his neck, and kiſſed him, we learn, that all paſt things were done away, and perfect peace for ever eſtabliſhed. The father expreſſed his kindneſs, before the ſon ſignified his contrition. God knows what is in our hearts: before we call, he anſwers. I ſaid, ſays David, I will confeſs, and thou forgaveſt.

Verſe 21ſt. *And the ſon ſaid unto him, Father, I have ſinned againſt heaven, and in thy ſight, and am no more worthy to be called thy ſon.*

The readineſs of the father to forgive, made the ſorrows of this youth riſe the higher. The truly good feel in proportion as they have wounded goodneſs, or injured ſenſibility, whether through paſſion, miſrepreſentation, or error in judgment. The Father might have had purpoſes of kindneſs, at the ſame time, upbraided him for his former imprudence. But determined not to do things by halves, and perſuaded that generoſity is the warmeſt incentive to gratitude, he buried every paſt act in oblivion, and wiſhed the preſent joy alone to occupy his mind. The mode of beſtow-

* Jer. xxxi. 18, 19, 20.

ing,

ing, either doubles the ſenſe of the favour; or half deſtroys it. Can my feelings glow towards the man, who in reſcuing me from diſtreſs; keeps lecturing me, on the weakneſs and folly, which brought me into it? On the other hand, when I perceive, with what ingenuity, he avoids calling up one painful idea, or ſuffers a word to eſcape, alluding to my imprudence; but ſtudies to pour the ſofteſt conſolation into every ſpring of woe, my boſom burns, indignant of reſtraint, and the tongue hurries to grateful acknowledgment.

Such effects, did the father's love produce in the prodigal's heart. Am I, with rapture he cries, in his arms again! honoured with every mark of affection, where I had merited ſevereſt cenſure. Never had he beheld his father in the light he did now: nor when he was keeping ſwine, did he loathe himſelf, as at this moment. Though his parent forgave him, he deems it his duty to prove the change, that had taken place, by frankly confeſſing his former guilt.

This eminently appears, throughout the character of the penitent. The manifeſtation of divine love, works admiration in the ſoul, at ſuch wondrous condeſcenſion: and the deepeſt abhorrence of former practices. On obtaining ſuch a view, Job declares he abhorred himſelf: and Iſaiah pathetically exclaims, Wo is me, for I am undone. David compoſed the 51ſt pſalm after Nathan had ſaid,

ſaid, The Lord hath taken away thy ſin, thou ſhalt not die. Peter wept bitterly, and Mary Magdalene waſhed a Saviour's feet in tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. The greater ſenſe he hath that God is pacified towards him, the more difficulty he has to forgive himſelf. Every ſin, whether open or ſecret, he wiſhes to recollect; and bitterly laments. With awe he reads, He that hides his ſins ſhall not proſper; but he that confeſſes and forſakes them, ſhall have mercy *. Now he eſteems the exerciſes of genuine devotion, and with integrity can ſay, that he hates the objects of his former delight, and the courſe of his daily practice. His vexation for his own ingratitude and rebellion, words cannot expreſs:—but the Spirit maketh known to God, by heart-felt ſighs.

Verſe 22d. *But the father ſaid to his ſervants, Bring forth the beſt robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and ſhoes on his feet.*

However unſolicited, this honeſt confeſſion muſt have been both pleaſing to the father's ear, and painful to his heart. The ſon would have requeſted only the rank of a ſervant; but parental affection breaks in on his narration, will hear no more of his unworthineſs; and to aſſure him of treatment like that of a ſon; commands the ſervants to diſcharge their duty, in waiting on him. Had

* Prov. xxviii. 13.

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it been poſſible, for a doubt to have remained in the breaſt of the ſon; it muſt have vaniſhed, when he heard the father order them to bring the beſt robe,—to ſtrip him of the nauſeous rags he wore, —and clothe him in the moſt elegant manner, which implied uniformity; therefore he adds, put a ring, bearing an impreſſion of my honours, expreſſive of his relation to me. No more ſhall his feet be hurt by every thorn, or lacerated by every pebble:—put ſhoes thereon. Some verſions add the word quickly, or haſte ye bring; intimating how eager he was to have him appear in a better plight; and liker the family, to which he really belonged.

When the heart of the penitent is drowned in ſorrow, for follies it hath done: and is pouring out the warmeſt ſupplications to the Throne of Mercy, the divine benignity of Him, who ſits thereon, often interrupts with a ſimilar order. By the ſervants, it is the general opinion, that the miniſters of the Goſpel are meant, and by the beſt robe, the righteouſneſs of Jeſus Chriſt; which excels all others, as far as infinite does finite, or perfection weakneſs. It is the beſt robe in reſpect of its own intrinſic worth, being wrought out by the active and paſſive obedience of Chriſt. This is frequently compared to a robe. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my ſoul ſhall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of ſalvation,

vation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteouſneſs *. And he anſwered, and ſpake unto thoſe that ſtood before him, ſaying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he ſaid: Behold I have cauſed thine iniquity to paſs from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment †. And to her was granted, that ſhe ſhould be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteouſneſs of the ſaints ‡. It is the beſt robe in the Father's eſteem, who is well pleaſed for his righteouſneſs ſake. Divine juſtice finds no flaw in it:—Divine truth hath no exceptions againſt it:—Divine holineſs beholds not the leaſt ſtain or blemiſh in it, becauſe it exactly anſwers that righteouſneſs, which the law requires. The greateſt characters mentioned in Scripture, have had the higheſt eſteem of it. I will make mention, ſays holy David, of thy righteouſneſs, even of thine only. And Paul ſuffered the loſs of all things, that he might be found in him, not having his own righteouſneſs, but the righteouſneſs of God, by faith in Chriſt. In a variety of ſenſes, it moſt aſſuredly is the beſt robe.

And put a ring on his hand. In Eaſtern climes, a ring was uſed to ſeal decrees, and as a badge of honour, none ſave nobility being allowed to wear it: witneſs Pharaoh's making it the token of Jo-

* Iſ. lxi. 10. † Zech. iii. 4. ‡ Rev. xix. 8.

ſeph's exaltation. Among the Romans, it denoted civil liberty, and was only permitted to the free-born, or thoſe who had purchaſed their freedom. It was antiently, and with many ſtill is a ſign of nuptial union. In all which, the ſpiritual application, is ſtrikingly beautiful, and peculiarly juſt.

"And ſhoes on his feet." In deſcribing the Chriſtian armour with its appendages; the Apoſtle particularizes this,—And your feet ſhod with the preparation of the Goſpel of Peace*: which in the opinion of Grotius, ſignifies, That when God receives true penitents, he honours them by rendering them, inſtrumental in the convertion of others, by their inſtructions, their example, or both. A pardoned David glories in teaching tranſgreſſors the ways of God; and Peter is enabled to ſtrengthen his brethren. Or, it may intimate, that they ſhall go on with reſolution, in the paths of piety and virtue. Wilt not thou, O God, keep my feet from falling? In the mouth of the Pſalmiſt muſt mean: Wilt thou deny thy grace, aſſiſting me, to guard againſt all the foibles of my nature, and the ſins which do moſt eaſily beſet me. True penitents have their fruits unto holineſs. Once they were diſorderly and profane; now they walk circumſpectly, having their converſation as becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt.

* Eph. vi. 15.

Verſe

Verſe 23d. *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it: and let us eat, and be merry.*

This prodigal came home naked, and he was clothed: hungry, and from this verſe we learn, he was not ſimply fed, he was feaſted. Bread would have been a ſweet exchange for huſks; it would have ſatisfied, nay revived him. This, though adequate to his deſires, came not up to the benignity of the father, who calls for the beſt he had, and to enhance the felicity, intends it ſhall be diffuſive. Get ready in the moſt acceptable manner, the choiceſt viands; which doubtleſs was followed by the richeſt wines he had:—Call my family together, that we may rejoice. Unexpected hath been the return of my ſon, inſtantaneous be our pleaſure at his recovery.

In the ſpiritual application of this; Divines in general have taken a wide range, inſtead of which, we ſhall endeavour to bring the ſubſtance of the whole into as ſhort, and comprehenſive a view as we can. We may here ſay of the true Chriſtian, what was predicated of Aſher. He ſhall have the beſt bread, and abundance of it. Calves were offered for ſin-offerings, for peace-offerings, and for burnt-offerings, and were among the ſacrifices to be offered in the day of atonement, conſequently by the phraſe here, our Lord is ſhadowed forth; who freely offered up himſelf, a ſacrifice to God, of a ſweet-ſmelling ſavour; of courſe effec-

tual to all the requiſite purpoſes. Or in a ſecondary point of view; it may allude, to the hoſpitable entertainment of friends and ſtrangers; in which this animal was preferred. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf, tender and good, and gave it unto a young man, and he haſted to dreſs it. And he took butter and milk, and the calf which he had dreſſed, and ſet it before them, and he ſtood by them under the tree, and they did eat *.—And the woman had a fat calf in the houſe, and ſhe haſted and killed it, and took flour and kneaded it, and did bake unleavened bread thereof. And ſhe brought it before Saul, and before his ſervant, and they did eat †.

The propriety however, of ſuppoſing our Redeemer herein implied, is confirmed by his own words, concerning himſelf. Except ye eat the fleſh of the ſon of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoſo eateth my fleſh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life. Hear how ſweetly, the Spirit of Inſpiration, deſcribes this ſoul-reviving feaſt. Wiſdom hath killed her beaſts, ſhe hath mingled her wine, and crieth, Whoſo is humble, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth ſpiritual underſtanding:—Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine, which I have mingled. Compliance with this gracious

* Gen. xviii. 7, 8. † 1 Sam. xxviii. 24, 25.

invitation,

invitation, leads to the richeſt treaſures. They ſhall be abundantly ſatisfied with the fat things of thy houſe: and thou ſhalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleaſure *. All who have been thus entertained, will rejoice in declaring with David; The Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold. He will give meat to them that fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant. It neceſſarily follows, that this muſt be the nobleſt food, ſince it is the device of the wiſdom of God, and hath its ſource in incomprehenſible love. It is rich food, if we examine what it nouriſhes, and improves; even our immortal ſouls, which otherwiſe ſtarve upon the huſks of a preſent life. Theſe all periſh, whereas this is incorruptible food, ſubject to no change in its nature, no variation in quality, and no diminution in quantity. The word of God abideth for ever, and Jeſus Chriſt is the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for ever. In value this ſurpaſſes our moſt exalted conceptions, though held out to us under the idea of a fatted calf, a lamb, or kid. Glance at a few of the amazing varieties contained. Hereby we are reconciled to our Creator, who inſtead of pouring out the wrath we had deſerved; condeſcends to pledge his perfections for our ſecurity, by declaring, no weapon formed againſt our ſpiri-

* Pſal. xxxvi. 8.

tual intereſts ſhall proſper. Juſtification, pardon of ſin, ſanctification, peace of conſcience, joy in the Holy Ghoſt, are among the rich contents of adoption into the family of God, and having fellowſhip with his ſon Jeſus Chriſt.

The enjoyment of ſpiritual bleſſings, is properly held forth by feeding on ſlain beaſts; becauſe thoſe appointed for ſacrifice were deemed the beſt. They were offered for the ſins of the people, and as in the caſe of the Paſcal Lamb, alſo ordained for food:—the whole prieſthood were to feed thereon, while a ſtranger was by no means intitled to that privilege. A ſtranger to virtue, intermeddleth not with religious joy. To thoſe who feed on the fatneſs of his houſe, the ordinances of the Goſpel, with the other uſual means of grace, are truly bleſſed; and the individuals growing ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, begin to triumph over inward corruption, and are enabled to do, and to ſuffer many things for the name of Jeſus.

Some weaker minds may be apt to dread, that they have no portion in theſe things. Perhaps they apprehend that to be good, which would, if granted, be detrimental; and they may happen to call that a grievance, which is a bleſſing in diſguiſe. Be their pittance ever ſo ſcanty,—Ought they to repine, if it comes with peace, and is enjoyed with contentment? A little that a righteous man hath,

hath, is better than the revenues of many wicked. The honey that is got without labour, is eaten without a reliſh. What though the medicine be bitter, if it anſwers its end?

By the ſervants deſired to bring it, we are to underſtand the Miniſters of the Goſpel, whoſe indiſpenſible duty it is to ſearch into its truths, in order to their having a competent knowledge of them, and to defend them againſt all oppoſition, from whatever quarter: and it ought to be their delight, to ſet them before the human underſtanding, in the plaineſt, yet moſt forcibly manner. However alluring the rewards annexed to the faithful diſcharge of this are; can it be denied, that many are in the profeſſion, who are groſsly ignorant? and numbers of the well-informed, who uſe the influence of their ſtation, in conjunction with their abilities, againſt the honour and glory of the Great Captain of our ſalvation; under whoſe ſtandard they nevertheleſs externally continue to ſtand, whereby they only add treaſon to ingratitude. All this they do, under the plauſible idea, of emancipating their fellow-creatures from vulgar errors, or the prejudices of ſyſtem and education, which for the moſt part amounts ſimply, to the detaching them from the belief, of all religious principles whatever; and thereby leaving a dreadful void in the human breaſt, which revelation is ſo well calculated to fill.

"Let us eat and be merry." There was joy in all hearts;—in the father's;—in the ſon's;—and in the ſervant's. To the Chriſtian may be applied the words of Solomon, Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works *. If there is joy in Heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, gladneſs ſhould fill the boſom of the followers of Chriſt, when they diſcern the wicked turn from his former ways, to the ſervice of the living God. Paul again and again, in his epiſtles, tells thoſe to whom he wrote, that they were his joy, and would be his crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord.

Verſe 24th. *For this my ſon was dead, and is alive again. He was loſt, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

Here we learn the particulars whereon this feſtival was grounded. The parent who can continue inflexible to the tears and penitence of a child, returning to a proper ſenſe of love and duty, is a monſter, not a man. The truly worthy character in the parable, delicately touches, yet candidly lays open the ſprings of his happineſs. This my ſon, whoſe misfortunes have taught him wiſdom; was, I acknowledge, long dead to me in many reſpects;—to moral obligation, and the practice of all goodneſs. But O the tranſport I feel!—which

* Eccleſ. ix. 7.

may

may be feebly collected from the glance, wherewith my eyes behold him at this moment, and the full tear, that trembles on every point of my eyelids:—And O the pleaſure it muſt diffuſe in every heart, to whom my intereſts are dear, to perceive the wondrous change; ſeeing he is now alive to me,—to himſelf,—in the ſtricteſt meaning of the word, and to all the comforts of reaſon and religion. He was loſt, in every rational ſenſe, to every worthy purpoſe;—to each generous act, and pure inclination. But is now found in all theſe;—is eager to diſplay the principles of his reformation, and to graſp every opportunity of cancelling both the recollection, and the conſequences of his former behaviour. You will augment my joy, in proportion as I ſee you all cordially enter into it, and the greater ſhare my ſon takes, muſt be peculiarly pleaſing.

All men are ſpiritually dead, according to the Apoſtolic idea. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in treſpaſſes and ſins. A living in the voluntary ſervice of ſin in Scripture, is frequently compared to death, the individual poſſeſſing neither the wiſh, nor the ability to do good. Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life, is the tender expoſtulation of our Redeemer, with the obſtinate Jews,

"And is alive again." Regeneration is often expreſſed by new life,—Likewiſe reckon ye alſo yourſelves to be dead indeed unto ſin, but alive unto God, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord *. The Holy Spirit breathes this divine life in the ſoul; on which like Lazarus he burſts from the fetters of bondage, and lives to the honour and glory of God. The true penitent is now tremblingly alive to the ſenſe of guilt, the dread of offending, and the active duties of holineſs in heart and life. A total change hath taken place in his deſires;—his views;—his objects;—and his concerns. Before he ſought only preſent gratifications, now he pants for God, and the tokens of his love and favour. His loſt beauty, as well as ſtrength, is reſtored; by his underſtanding being enlightened, — his affections ſet on things above, — and his mind in ſweet ſubjection to the law of Chriſt.

He was loſt in the regions of ſin, and improvident of its iſſue. Divine grace overtakes him,—the call to him is made effectual, which proves the firm baſis of the mercy announced. "But is "found." Hath taken a wiſe reſolution to deliver himſelf from the deplorable ſituation he was in: even to come to his father's houſe, where there is bread enough, and to ſpare. Now he is regaled with the dainties of it,—ſits under the roof

* Rom. vi. 11.

with

with ſecurity,—and finds the fruit much to his taſte. "They began to be merry." Union to God is the ſpring of our felicity,—communion with him the taſte thereof; both which are on this ſide the grave; and fruition the perfection of it, which is reſerved for the countleſs periods of eternity. In conſequence of this ſpiritual union and communion, ariſes a warm reciprocity of affections; which hath many indearing qualities, incapable of change, from any human viciſſitudes. In peace, in war; in riches, in poverty; in health, in ſickneſs; in light, in darkneſs; at home, abroad; in ſpirituals, in temporals; they commit all to the wiſe ſuperintendance of an Infinite Providence. After all, we admit the propriety of conſidering the feſtival, as typical of the Lord's Supper, which is one of the neareſt approaches, we can make to God on this ſide eternity, and is an ordinance, which to the genuine Chriſtian, hath afforded the pureſt joys. Prayer is an act of homage, praiſe is the fruit of gratitude, but this is truly the love-feaſt in our heavenly Father's houſe. What an honour to ſit at the table of the King of kings? and to be thus graciouſly accoſted, What is thy petition, and if it ultimately tend to thy advantage, it ſhall be granted; and thy requeſt, though it extended not to the half, but the whole of a kingdom? Here the Saviour calls them friends, and welcomes them to the riches of the new Covenant in his blood. If any man hear my voice,

and

and open the door, I will come in to him, and will ſup with him, and he with me *. Such communion ſtrengthens our weakneſs; under its refreſhing influences, we revive as the corn, and grow as the vine. And Paul declares, what every genuine Chriſtian experiences, that it leaves a divine impreſſion on the ſoul. But we all with open face, beholding as in a glaſs the glory of the Lord, are changed into the ſame image, from glory to glory, even as by the ſpirit of the Lord †.

Verſe 25th. *Now his elder ſon was in the field, and as he came, and drew nigh to the houſe, he heard muſic and dancing.*

We have already admitted, that by the elder brother, moſt probably, the Scribes and Phariſees are deſigned, who toiled hard in the round of external duties, for that which ſatisfieth not, and while they entered not in by the way proſcribed, themſelves; were even angry at thoſe who did, uncandidly, as well as unjuſtly, apprehending the excluſive privilege belonged to them.

In explaining the remaining verſes, we ſhall conſider them as characteriſtic of thoſe, who may never have run out into flagrant vices, or glaring improprieties; who nevertheleſs have only the form of godlineſs without the power, and are ſatisfied with the appearance, independent of the reality of virtue. Where perſons are coldly re-

* Rev. iii. 20. † 2 Cor. iii. 18.

gular,

gular, from the want of paſſions, or nice ſenſibility; are they entitled to our approbation? No more than the tortoiſe is to be blamed, for its ſlowneſs. Let ſuch characters look ever ſo coy, and put on what moroſeneſs they pleaſe, for their affected virtue or ſanctity is nothing elſe:—no man of ſenſe will covet their conſequence; ſince it is neither founded on their abilities, or amiable temper, and benevolent conduct; but it is a kind of ſurreptitious incenſe, only offered by bigots or fools. Far more worthy in the eye of juſt diſcernment, is the warm, open, honeſt heart, which thinking no evil, would not willingly injure the leaſt of his fellow-creatures; but rich in fine and liberal ſentiments, is eager to relieve, and invariably ſympathizes with another's woe, however many, or manifeſt the deviations, they may occaſionally make from ſyſtematic decorum, or profeſſional formaliſm. Let the rectitude of the heart, built on the eternal laws of unadulterated and indiſputable truth be maintained; and the ſallies of youth, of imagination, and the peculiar temperament of the body, will among the wiſe be eaſily pardoned, if not overlooked. Allowing, what is ſeldom the caſe, that the apparently moſt rigid character, which makes no excuſe, and inſiſts on every punctilio, to be the honeſteſt at bottom; or that the principles of the moſt preciſe, are always the juſteſt, yet why indulge in the temper, or purſue that line of conduct, tending rather to deter, than allure

lure to the practice of virtue? Can the ſtiff, hypocritical profeſſor, who walks ſo demure, that one would be tempted to think he dreaded, the right eye ſhould overlook the left:—can he, we ſay, ſecure any thing, ſave the moſt ſovereign contempt? when on a nearer ſcrutiny he is found, to be nothing but a hedge-hog, whoſe prickles are ſingularly offenſive, to each philanthropic mind around him. To have a character with ſome people:—many gloomy countenances, keep looking downwards, without once ſuſpecting, that the truly good and penetrating, conceive this to be no mean indication of their conſcience telling them, were the truth known, they ought to be aſhamed to look an honeſt man in the face.

How common is it to hear a cold, ignorant, preciſe wretch boaſting of his freedom from this, or the other vice? to which conſtitutionally he is averſe, and anxiouſly concealing his own darling foible, with the pleaſure he feels in the gratification of the ſtronger propenſities of his nature. Mark yon ſly hagard in the corner, how ſanctified he ſeems!—hark how hollow and deep toned are his praiſes of all that think as he does; yet reprobates a laugh, as bordering on levity: and impiouſly condemns all thoſe that differ from him. Bluſh ye preachers, who pin ſalvation to your own tenets, and dare to ſuppoſe the heavenly gates will be ſhut againſt thoſe, who after an honeſt, painful ſearch, may reprobate them: for thoſe the moſt

eminent

eminent in the purſuits of truth, are above reprobating, or even cenſuring perſons. Why ſhould a man limit that grace or mercy to others, in the eyes of which, the leaſt reflection may prove, that he himſelf would have been one of the juſteſt exceptions?

To return,—we find this ſelf-righteous brother, comes cautiouſly from the fields of his more ſecret game, as high in his own conceit as ever, and equally diſpoſed to reprove, whatever coincides not with his own contracted plan of thinking. How ſlow he ſteps! how ſuſpicious he looks!—when, lo, he ſtarts!—ſomething hath offended his eyes, or wounded his holy ſpirit. Muſic the delight, he cries, of the ſinful:—Dancing too,—ah, ſure the work of the ungodly. Admit, he did not judge ſo harſhly of the things themſelves: yet is his ſelfiſhneſs clear, from his being offended at their being carried on, without his preſence or approbation.

Verſe 26th. *And he called one of the ſervants, and aſked, what theſe things meant.*

A Diſciple, or miniſter of the word, may here be meant; nor was it uncommon with the Scribes and Phariſees, when they were diſpleaſed with his doctrine, ſooner to accoſt his friends than himſelf. And when the Scribes and Phariſees ſaw him eat with publicans and ſinners; they ſaid unto his

his diſciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and ſinners? *

Whereas the view I have taken of the elder brother, inclines me to think, he called ſome ſycophant of his own, who ſwarm round thoſe that are in plenty, and aware how much their coming in for a part, depends on their powers of flattery, and their varniſhing the foibles of thoſe, to whoſe fancied virtues they proſtitute truth and ſincerity, moſt readily can point out flaws in the characters of thoſe, in whom they have reaſon to believe, there is a wiſh, nay a pleaſure to find them.

There are among profeſſing Chriſtians ſome ſo mean, ſo thoroughly degenerate, as to ſubſiſt, perhaps pave the way to opulence, by communicating the foibles of their fellow-creatures. Many have been rewarded for ſullying the pureſt innocence;—decoying the moſt perfect ſimplicity,—or retarding the uſefulneſs of real genius, who after all, are not by half ſo contemptible, as thoſe who encourage them, or pay them the wages of their helliſh traffic. He that willingly miſrepreſents a good action, is a baſer wretch, than he that through natural imbecility commits a bad one. Should it be contended, that from the context I have no right to put this conſtruction; permit me to decline the diſpute, reckoning it enough, that this tallies with experience in all ages, which have exhibited num-

* Mark. ii. 16.

berleſs

berleſs inſtances of miſery, reſulting from partiality, too ſtrongly indulged in our own caſe, or in that of others.

Verſe 27th. *And he ſaid unto him, thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, becauſe he hath received him ſafe and ſound.*

It frequently happens, that thoſe who may have been a comfort to their parents, expect a monopoly of both their affections and favours, and grudge the leaſt particle of either, conferred on thoſe, who have tranſgreſſed. After all, who would not much ſooner be Mary Magdalene, than the haughty Phariſee uttering his pompous prayer? Among profeſſors of Chriſtianity, it is too often found, that thoſe, who through divine grace, have been reſtrained from more ſcandalous ſins, are yet manifeſtly deficient in affording either relief or compaſſion to them, who have been intangled therein. Nay, how cruel are they at times to their failings? obſerving a degree of diſtributive juſtice, which, O dreadful! were it by a righteous God, to be adminiſtered in their own caſe, would for ever deſtroy them.

Let us mark the reply—"Thy brother:"—he that was diſſatisfied at home,—who inſiſted on a diviſion of the patrimony,—and ſet out with all the pageantry of youthful ſtate, he is come naked, and in the moſt deplorable condition as to externals: but in a wonderful alteration of mind;—deeply ſenſible of his offences;—and acknowledging his father's goodneſs

goodneſs in paſſing over what is paſt: and from this amazing change ſo viſible in him, the father hath made a feaſt to communicate his own joy,—to diſpel the fears of the ſon, and to encourage others to ſimilar amendment.

The word in the original, the Arabic renders ſafe;—the Syriac ſound, and our verſion by both: of courſe he hath killed the fatted calf, which we domeſtics, thought was reſerved for ſome occaſion, whereon thy zeal in his ſervice, and thy filial obedience were both to be acknowledged and rewarded:—pardon a ſervant's preſuming to ſpeak his opinion; much more to decide on the conduct of ſo juſt, and good a father as your's. Thus artfully did he foment the ſpirit, that already rankled in his breaſt, and in like manner do many groveling ſouls, by ſly inſinuations, drive to greater outrages thoſe, who under more honeſt monitors, would have been far leſs criminal. The too eaſily adopting the counſels of others, for the moſt part leads us into the greateſt indiſcretion; the very dread of which, joined to dear bought experience, ought to make us weigh every circumſtance maturely, and attempt diving into the various motives of the ſpeaker, in order to aſcertain, whether his ultimate views are for our advantage, or his own.

Verſe 28th. *And he was angry, and would not go in, therefore came his father out, and entreated him.*

At

At this moment his mind reſembled the raging ſea, whoſe waves caſt up mire and dirt; and this not only in a brother, but in a father's face; ſuperadded to its being uncourteous to all, who were rejoicing together with them. How often do the paſſionate conceive an affront, where none was intended? Probably he reaſoned thus. Was it not imprudent in my father, to receive a profligate, without reproach; nay to dreſs him in the beſt robe, and ſhew ſuperior marks of reſpect, to what he had ever paid to faithful ſervices, and ſteady attachment? This was ſomething of a piece with their conduct, who found fault with the maſter of the vineyard, for paying as much to them, who had only come in at the eleventh hour, as to thoſe who had borne the heat of the day: apprehending, if theſe received ſo much, they in juſtice ought to have had more. The anſwer given by the maſter of the vineyard, might ſerve on this occaſion. But as the mode of arguing here, attributed to the elder brother, is much adopted by modern formaliſts, let us diſſect it?

He ſets out on wrong principles, conſequently his concluſions are erroneous. His father had not received a profligate, but a penitent, whom it was his duty to encourage by all poſſible means, and to ſtrengthen his growing virtues. It gives a double pleaſure to recover, what we feared had been loſt. This ſurly dogmatiſt, would have been happy, if his father had rejected him, though his own child,

and his brother. So highly did he reſent this inſtance of unaffected goodneſs, that he would not go in: yet mark the ardour, with which the father comes out to him:—not ſending a ſervant, leſt a miſtake might happen, and as willing to juſtify his conduct to a peeviſh ſon, as he was ready to receive a repenting one. It is ſaid, "he entreated him", whereby we are to underſtand, his uſing every indearing, and winning motive, tending to induce him to come in, and complete the domeſtic joy.

This holds out to us a ſweet picture of the divine goodneſs, towards thoſe of a froward and provoking temper. He reaſoned with Cain—Why art thou wroth? In what a condeſcending way, did he expoſtulate with Elijah, when he thought himſelf, the only ſurviving true worſhipper of God?—and how graciouſly with Jonah?—whoſe caſe is ſomewhat ſimilar to the preſent, for he was diſquieted at the mercy ſhewn to repenting Nineveh, —Doſt thou well to be angry? And ſhould not I ſpare Nineveh?—Notwithſtanding all this, many piquing themſelves on idle pretences, and the ſhadows of morality; refuſe to imbibe a better ſpirit, and act on juſter principles. They grudge the bounties of Providence to others, though they are ſupported from the ſame ſource: and as to the means of grace, they would almoſt dare to deny them, if they could, to thoſe who may have been eccentric in their practice, and whoſe reputations

have

have been ſullied. What ſay thoſe pillars of phariſaic pride?—ſhall we ſit with them, who have conſorted with publicans and ſinners?—ſhall we deign to draw, were it even in a good cauſe, with thoſe who have mingled in the world,—and approved of many of its amuſements, by partaking of them? No,—we will not. After all, they may have both hearts and heads, vaſtly ſuperior to your's. Admitting them to have been the chief of ſinners, provided they have ſeen the error of their ways, and in ſecret confeſſed unto the Lord, purpoſing to follow on to know him;—praying for ſtrength from above, to aſſiſt them in the performance of all duty;—Who are you, that pretend to ſay, Stand by, for I am holier than ſuch are?—Whom Infinite mercy receives,—will you deſpiſe? Whom the precious blood of a Redeemer doth waſh,—will you call foul? Will you affect the niceſt ſcrupuloſity in your aſſociating with others; whilſt with pompous ſtare, you continue to exclaim, that for the vileſt of the vile a Saviour died? Will you rant away in public,—in private, about divine love, and your love of God; whoſe boſoms are implacable to a fellow-creature, whoſe offences, whatever may have been their aggravations in the ſight of God, have never injured you? Were ye children of the ſame Father, ye would copy his example; and rejoice to pour conſolation into the wounded ſpirit, and to alleviate in a ſpecial manner, the woes of thoſe, whoſe

accurate diſcrimination of moral character, makes their own feelings, their bittereſt accuſers.

Verſe 29th. *And he anſwering, ſaid to his father; Lo! theſe many years do I ſerve thee; neither tranſgreſſed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gaveſt me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.*

I am very ſenſible, that ſome learned writers, view the whole of this dialogue as figurative of the Jewiſh Church; which received not Chriſt; and diſdained thoſe who did: yet the benevolent Father of their Church and them, came out to them, not in an angry, but a peaceable temper, ſtill willing they ſhould come in, and embrace the Goſpel diſpenſation. That nation had the miniſtry of the word, both by Angels and men. The Almighty went forth to them by his prophets, and at laſt by his Son, whom though they crucified, we know, the miniſtry of the word by his diſciples, was a long time continued to them. To aggrandize our ideas of the patience, and long ſuffering mercy of God, under the phraſe, "and entreated him," in the preceding verſe, the Perſic verſion reads, and ſaid unto him;—Why doſt thou not go in?

On this view, the words before us, ſhadow out the arrogancy of the Jews, preſuming on their righteouſneſs by the law, which nevertheleſs they continually were breaking, and thereby provoking the Moſt High. From their having been his peculiar people, they were as high minded, as if they had never

never rebelled:—and as unthankful, as if God had never done any thing for them, worthy of their ſervice.

Inſtead however, of purſuing this tract, we return to that, wherein we prefer walking. The ſelf-righteous, like the toad in the fable, ſwolen with the notions of their own importance, think none ſuperior, and ſcarce any equal to themſelves. The boaſting of virtue, certainly leſſens at leaſt its influence, and in the opinion of many ſound thinkers, on moral and religious ſubjects, implies the want of it. An elegant writer of our own, hath ſaid, that no wiſe man will ever boaſt of that, wherein he peculiarly excells, remarking, that a handſomer thing was never ſaid of the famous Cowley, than that none, ſave his intimate acquaintance, could ever learn from his converſation, that he was a poet. Of a different complexion was this elder brother, who boaſts of what he hath done; thereby annulling the obligations due to his ſervices. No favour which one man can do to another, gives the leaſt foundation for boaſting: except that of ſaving life, at the hazard of our own, and this not ariſing from our perſonal merit; which by the bye is not eſſentially hurt or diminiſhed, but from the conſideration of the other's value to the community,—his family, or friends.

Inſtead of complying with his father's requeſt, and yielding obedience to the dictates of Religion

and nature, he dares to remonſtrate, and there are few remonſtrances, that do not over-rate the real grievances. His moſt aſſuredly did. "Lo! theſe many years do I ſerve thee, neither tranſgreſſed I at any time thy commandments." What many deem an impropriety in language, others conſider as an aggravation of his fault; viz. his ſaying not ſimply, theſe many years have I ſerved thee, but *do* I ſerve thee: denoting the continuance of his ſervice, and that his life was an uniform ſeries of obedience. Reſpecting his having never at any time tranſgreſſed his Father's commands, it may fairly be ſuſpected, ſince had that been fact, would he now have proved ſo obſtinate to his entreaties? Is it not ſafer to underſtand it, as ſimply importing, he neither had been ſo openly wicked, nor ſo notoriouſly diſobedient as his brother?

"And yet thou never gaveſt me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." Well ſaid the antient Sage, beware of paſſion, for it is a ſhort madneſs: during the paroxyſms of which, many worthy characters have done and ſaid, what in their calmer moments they not only deteſted, but what excruciated them, ever after, during their lives. The tendereſt friendſhips, cloſeſt connexions, and warmeſt ties of nature, have in theſe moments of infatuation been diſſolved:—the moſt intereſting ſecrets diſcovered:—mutual confidence deſtroyed,—and conjugal felicity weakened, if not broke. Of paſſion it may be ſaid:—O the pleaſures which thou

thou haſt ſacrificed!—And O what virtues thou haſt ſlain or wounded! — Ye males, — and it pains me to add, ye females;—ſince, notwithſtanding the natural ſoftneſs of your ſex, and general mildneſs of your temper, ſome of you have been caught in the intemperate ſallies of paſſion, guard againſt them, more than ever the timid ſailors of old, did againſt rapacious Scylla, or devouring Charybdis. We grant none are more univerſally avoided, and juſtly blamed, than paſſionate perſons; after all, there are numberleſs caſes, were their remorſe properly conſidered, few characters are more entitled to our pity.

To return to the unhappy inſtance before us: Had not this elder brother been out of humour to an immoderate degree, he would not have made this complaint! Doubtleſs, if he had ever aſked a kid, or any ſuch reaſonable requeſt, he might have had it at the firſt word!—or could the father ever dream he wiſhed ſuch a thing, when the plenty of the family was at his ſervice, in whoſe more joyous moments, he had frequently partook of richer dainties than uſual? Thoſe who think more highly of themſelves, and of their ſervices that they ought to think, are apt to conceive meanly of their benefactors, and their favours.

Verſe 30th. *But as ſoon as this thy ſon was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou haſt killed for him the fatted calf.*

Nothing more betrays the weakneſs and imperfection of human nature, than general cenſure;

and few things better indicate the temper of an individual, than the mode, in which he deals out particular accuſations. We mean not to deny there may be occaſions for it :—whilſt we contend, that the perſon uſing the privilege ought to poſſeſs many qualities, and ſtand in a peculiar predicament. It not unfrequently happens, that theſe indulge themſelves with the greateſt latitude in the diſtribution, whoſe own foibles and vices render them far juſter objects of thoſe bitter invectives, and cruel reproaches, which they ſo wantonly throw around, and in which infernal work, they appear to take the moſt ſingular delight. There is no vice in the condemnation of which, mankind are more generally united, and ſcarce one from ſome degree whereof, ſo few are totally exempted.

How often may we find reſpectable characters, and good people overtaken in this vice! for we deem it more than a fault that can eaſily be overlooked. They treat with coldneſs, and wound by the aſperity of animadverſion, thoſe whoſe reputations may on particular occaſions have ſuffered, though they may have given evident tokens of their pungent ſorrow on the account, with manifeſt proofs of amendment. As far as eaſt is from the weſt, is ſuch barbarity, remote from the ſpirit of Chriſtianity; and is the undoubted offſpring of human pride and vain glory. Granting we ought to ſhun the ſociety of thoſe, who might injure our virtue by their principles or practices :

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we are equally commanded in the pages of inſpiration, to bind up the broken hearted, and to ſtrengthen the feeble knees.

Void of the leaſt tincture of this temper, this formal profeſſor would not go in, becauſe his brother was there. We own he diſcovered here, more of the fiend, than of the bigot: in refuſing, even, that a father's roof, ſhould cover him and his brother. This Phariſee diſowned the tie which nature made:—he would not call him brother,—but with a ſneer, "this thy ſon" obliquely reflecting on the father, as if his indulgence, had made him a prodigal. There are inſtances, where this carried to extremes, contributes much towards it, but there is not the ſhadow of a probability, that that had been the caſe here.

As a proof of the malignity, which rankled in his boſom, he paints his brother's conduct in the worſt light. Where we hate, it is eaſy to blacken. "Thy ſon who hath devoured thy living with harlots." He had been impatient of reſtraint,—ſet out void of the knowledge of the world, and in poſſeſſion of a fortune, which he had very fooliſhly ſpent. Nor is it improbable, as gaming was not then the faſhionable vice it is now, but that part of it was ſpent as ſpecified; nevertheleſs, how did he know that? He could not prove it: however ſmoothly the words came over his tongue, he had no foundation for them, ſave the aſperſing his brother's character, of which had another acted

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ſo by him, he would moſt loudly have complained. Beſides, he urges a direct falſhood, that he had devoured his father's living. He had ſquandered away his own, but not another's, much leſs his father's, who had enough and to ſpare; otherwiſe it might have fared but indifferently with the elder brother, in ſpite of all his boaſted ſervices.

Out comes the true cauſe at laſt, of all this virulent ſpleen, "Thou haſt killed for him the fatted calf." Hinc illæ lachrymæ!—As if he had ſaid;—What elſe couldſt thou have done for the moſt obedient and meritorious Son? Vain glory, aware of its having no ſolid ground to reſt upon; that it is a vox & nihil preterea, conſiders every compliment paid to thoſe around, or incenſe offered any where, ſave to its own drag, as an accuſation of its internal emptineſs. Had he not ſtood in this predicament, he never would have acted thus? Scripture and reaſon, unite in teaching; that not even thoſe, who perſiſt in wickedneſs, ought by man, to be deprived of the means of ſubſiſtance, or the gifts of ordinary Providence: much leſs ought we to grudge the chief of ſinners, the gifts of ſpecial grace on their ſincere repentance. Paul before his converſion, had devoured his heavenly Father's living, in a figurative ſenſe, by the havoc he made of the Church: yet when after his converſion, he had greater meaſures of grace given him, than the other Apoſtles; who were the elder brethren, that had been ſerving Chriſt, when he

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was perſecuting him; they did not envy him his viſions and revelations, nor his more extenſive uſefulneſs; but glorified God in him. By this better example, let Chriſtians demean themſelves.

Verſe 31ſt. *And he ſaid unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

Thoſe who confine this dialogue to the Jews, or Scribes and Phariſees, are hard put to it on this verſe; and are obliged to explain the words, under many limitations; whereas in the view we have taken, the ſenſe is obvious. This worthy parent, aware that a ſoft anſwer turneth away wrath, choſe rather to gain him by gentle means, than irritate him to greater extremes, by diſplaying his authority. With a look, that doubtleſs beſpoke more than language could expreſs, he tenderly, and moſt emphatically calls him ſon. Did I ever act towards thee, as if inſenſible of that relation? and if thy filial reſpect hath been more uniform, than that of thy brother, hath not my attachment to thee, and approbation of thy conduct been in proportion?

"Thou art ever with me." The reception of him is no ſlighting of thee, nor ſhall what is laid out on him, in the leaſt infringe on thy juſt claims. Thou ſhalt ſtill remain intitled to the pars enitia, as our law calls it;—to the double portion, as the Jewiſh law called it;—thou ſhalt be heres ex aſſe, the Roman law would have expreſſed it. Why then my ſon, deny thyſelf, the nobleſt of all

joys, to ſee the wretched ſmile by our ſympathy and beneficence? to behold the tears of penitence ſwelling into ſtreams of lively gratitude, and the eyes and hands which were caſt down, raiſed with animation, and true expreſſion towards Heaven, in aſking the beſt bleſſings on the heads of their melting relations, returning friends, and forgiving acquaintance. Baniſh each ſelfiſh thought;—each illiberal ſentiment;—give ſcope to ſenſibility, the faireſt, though coyeſt daughter of humanity. Soft ſhould be the handkerchief, and gentle the hand, that from her, attempts to wipe the tear.

Verſe 32d. *It was meet, that we ſhould make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again: and was loſt, and is found.*

In this verſe, the venerable parent purſues the mild plan of argumentation, with which he ſet out. Apprized, that ſhewing authority upon every occaſion, only ſerves to demean it, in the eyes of thoſe, by whom it ought to be reverenced; by declining its exertions, he much more to the purpoſe ſays:—"It was meet,"—it was decent and reaſonable, that we ſhould make merry. May we not venture to affirm, the very nature of the caſe poſitively required it. What man in his ſenſes, would not, under the firſt impreſſions, be more tranſported at the return of a prodigal ſon, than even for the perſeverance of a dutiful one? The latter, as hath been well obſerved by a ſerious writer on this ſubject, may be a greater bleſſing to a family;

a family; while the former is a more ſenſible pleaſure. In the one caſe, the comfort is ſerene and moderated:—in the other, it is inſtantaneous and tranſporting. To decide this point, let us appeal to the experience of mankind, by aſking thoſe who have families, and prudence enough, to render their attachment to their children, equal on the whole:—ſuppoſe one ſon labouring under a dangerous illneſs, which by all around is pronounced to be mortal:—an unexpected change happens, and he is perfectly reſtored, does not the parent feel more ſenſibly on this emergency, for this child, than for the other, who never ailed, whom he nevertheleſs moſt tenderly loves?

By this reaſoning it appears, the elder brother's wrath was totally diſarmed:—he made no reply; but acquieſced in his father's pleaſure,—and hurried to bury all ſenſe of the paſt, in the mutual warmth of a fraternal embrace. Hence we may notice, that though a good man keeps not his temper at all times, yet he lies not long under the power of paſſion;—his reaſon eagerly reſumes the reins, with a view to greater circumſpection. Though he falls, he will riſe again. And if the Roman Poet thought the quarrels of lovers, proved only the renewal of affection; with equal propriety we may preſume to conclude, that tranſient breaches, frequently ſtrengthen friendſhips. Perhaps thoſe brothers, reſpected each other, more ſincerely than ever they did before; and mutually ſtrove to

advance the intereſt of their worthy father, in promoting the happineſs of all around them.

No particular inferences we truſt are requiſite; to preſs the truths, couched in this parable on our minds. Doth the Almighty proclaim by the Prophet,—Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon *? Then let ſinners complying with the declaration, though depreſſed by fears, truſt in the Lord Jehovah, ſince in him is everlaſting ſtrength. The name of the Lord is a ſtrong tower, the righteous runneth to it, and are ſafe.

Whenever we diſcern the dawn of amendment in our fellow-creatures; inſtead of diſcouraging them by too ſharp rebukes, or the coolneſs of our behaviour, which on Chriſtian principles, no offences of theirs, were they even perſonal as to us, can juſtify; let it be our ſtudy to ſhew the goodneſs of our hearts, by our readineſs to forgive, and our alacrity to cheriſh, the riſing plants of virtue and religion. Hereby in a ſpecial manner we imitate the Son of God, who came to ſeek and ſave that which was loſt; beſide ſecuring to ourſelves, the pureſt ſatisfaction, in being inſtrumental to another's bliſs. For there is no pleaſure equal to the well-grounded hopes of the Di-

* Iſ. lv. 7.

vine

vine approbation, with the preſent joys of a ſelf-approving mind. To one impreſſed with a ſenſe of the value of an immortal ſoul, and the awful realities of eternity; Attalic conditions, are not equipollent, to the conſideration of having been uſeful, in exciting a rational being to the practice of all goodneſs, in direct conformity to the precepts of the Goſpel, and the ſpotleſs life of Jeſus, till they arrive at perfection. Methinks I hear every faithful Diſciple of the Redeemer, exclaim with honeſt zeal; — O be that tranſport mine! which may the Lord of his infinite mercy, grant through Jeſus Chriſt; to whom, with the Father, and bleſſed Spirit, One God; be all praiſe, glory, power, and dominion, for ever and ever, Amen, and Amen.

EXPO-

EXPOSITION VII.

LUKE XVI. laſt Thirteen Verſes.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of ſores, And deſiring to be fed with the crumbs, which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came, and licked his ſores. And it came to paſs, that the beggar died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's boſom. The rich man alſo died, and was buried. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his boſom. And he cried and ſaid, Father Abraham have mercy on me, and ſend Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham ſaid, Son, remember, that thou in thy life time receivedſt thy good things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beſide all this, between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed: ſo that they which would paſs from hence to you cannot: neither can they paſs to us, that would come from thence. Then he ſaid, I pray thee therefore Father, that thou wouldſt ſend him to my father's houſe, for I have five brethren: that he may teſtify unto them, leſt they alſo come into this place of torment. Abraham ſaith unto him, They have Moſes and the Prophets; let them hear them. And he ſaid, Nay, Father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes, and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.

THIS portion of ſcripture contains perhaps the fulleſt atteſtation of a future ſtate, which is to be found in the pages of revelation. The word hell ſeldom occurs, and when it does, Divines are by no means agreed upon its preciſe ſignification. In the 16th pſalm, it unqueſtionably means no more than the grave, or bodily ſtate of the dead. Nor did Peter mean any thing more by it, when he quoted from this pſalm, in his celebrated ſermon at Pentecoſt.

Conſidered as the place of torment, it goes by various appellations in ſcripture. In the 25th chapter of Matthew, it is called everlaſting fire, prepared for the devil, and his angels. The Apoſtle Paul writing to the Theſſalonians; from the malice of whoſe fellow-citizens, he had once narrowly eſcaped with his life, deſcribed the laſt judgment, or ſecond coming of Chriſt, to be in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God: Who ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. In the book of the Revelation, it is named the bottomleſs pit, and the lake that burneth with fire and brimſtone, which is the ſecond death. This laſt, correſponds with the language of the pſalmiſt. Upon the wicked

wicked he ſhall rain ſnares, fire, and brimſtone, and an horrible tempeſt. At other times, it is deſcribed as a cup; for inſtance, where it is ſaid of the wicked man:—That he ſhall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, into the cup of his indignation, and he ſhall be tormented with fire and brimſtone, in the preſence of the holy Angels, and in the preſence of the Lamb. And the ſmoke of their torment aſcendeth up for ever, and they have no reſt, day nor night. In our Saviour's ſermon on the mount, he twice uſes the word hell, to expreſs the place of torment; and in the paſſage before us, we have a corroborating teſtimony, from the diſmal ſituation, of a miſerable object in it.

As life and immortality, are clearly brought to light by the Goſpel, our Saviour may be ſuppoſed to have deſigned this parable, if it be one, as an immediate alluſion, to the only two poſſible, and ſeparate ſtates, in that unſeen world, on the verge of which we ſtand. Strongly impreſſed with this idea, many have contended, that it is not a parable, but a narrative, of matter of fact as to the characters; with their reſpective circumſtances, which might have happened before, or even in our Saviour's time, when upon earth; nay during his public miniſtry. The Roman Catholic writers, who are always greater ſticklers for tradition than revelation; pretend with as much authority, as they have for many other far more important mat-

ters, that the place in, or near Jeruſalem, can ſtill be ſhewn, where the ſtately dome of this rich man ſtood. They forget the expreſs annunciation relative to its deſtruction; that not one ſtone of it was to be left upon another, and that amidſt the various revolutions, that have happened in the land of Paleſtine, by battles,—change of maſters,—with almoſt all poſſible kinds of devaſtation, it is not very credible, that a lordly building hath ſurmounted them all, and ſtands untouched. No faith, weaker than that which ſwallows the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, can admit of this legendary tale.

After all, we incline rather to believe it a deſcription, than a parable. It muſt be granted, that it differs widely from all the reſt, wherein ſpiritual things are repreſented by ſimilitudes, drawn from earthly matters,—the irrational creation, or human nature in its preſent ſtate: Whereas on this occaſion, ſpiritual things are repreſented by a picture, of the different ſtates of good or bad men, in this world, and the other; to elucidate which leading point of Chriſtianity, was one great end of our Redeemer's incarnation, and never wholly unconnected with his diſcourſes.

Is it not fact, that thouſands trampled upon by the great, and neglected by the world at large, in leaving mortality with its load of woes, find their reliſh for, as well as their rank in glory, ſingularly heightened, from the number and ſeverity of their

ſorrows

ſorrows on this ſide the grave? May not the reverſe be equally true? that tyrants and epicures, who ſport in cruelty, and live in luxury; unmindful of the wants of others, and deaf to the claims of virtue, or groans of diſtreſs: without the leaſt compaſſion for, much leſs beneficence to worthy, indigent characters, muſt at laſt come to a dying moment, which conſigns them to that ſtate of indeſcribable anguiſh, which proves the more grievous and terrible to them, on account of the ſenſual, or wicked lives they led, and the opportunities of doing good, which they once enjoyed, but ſhall no more return.

Is there any thing like ſimilitude in this? In oppoſition to thoſe, who hold, that the dialogue between Abraham and the rich man, proves it a parable, ſince, ſay they, there is no diſcourſe can be held between thoſe in heaven, and thoſe in hell, it might in the firſt place be aſked: What poſitive evidence is there of this? Or will it be denied, that there are ſeveral points in theology, eſtabliſhed in general eſtimation, upon far leſs authority, than what may be derived from this ſingle paſſage? that there is ſome ſuch communication, eſpecially, when we maturely conſider, the quality and knowledge of the ſpeaker.

Should it be urged;—then theſe ſtates are not far ſeparate; Suffice it at preſent to ſay, we have no right to apply our ideas of diſtance, when in the body, in order to communicate with one ano-

ther, which are only got through the medium of our ſenſes;—to pure ſpirits, whoſe manner of operation we are entire ſtrangers to,—than we have any reaſonable grounds to ſuppoſe, that the Angel, who ſlew the ſeventy thouſand Aſſyrians in one night, was obliged to be actually near, and deal a blow to every man. The diſcourſe between Abraham and the rich man, is only an illuſtration of the deſcription, to render it the more affecting, like that between God and ſatan in the hiſtory of Job.

The perverſe Phariſees had dared to jeſt at Chriſt's ſermon againſt worldly-mindedneſs, wherefore in a more ſolemn way than uſual, to make thoſe mockers aſhamed, if not ſerious, he narrates an occurrence; the particulars whereof, were perhaps within the cognizance of ſome who heard him. We dare not poſitively aſſert, that in theſe notions, we are right: while we appeal to every genuine Chriſtian, and to thoſe converſant with ſacred literature; whether there be not a much greater probability, that we are ſo, than a modern commentator, with whom we in general agree, hath for the very ſingular conſtruction, he hath put on this paſſage of holy writ; the obvious meaning of which, were it not for the well-known piety, ability, and integrity of the Author, one would be almoſt tempted to believe, he had been at pains to conceal, or explain away.

He

He roundly affirms, the rich man to ſignify the Jews, and the glorious ſpeaker our Redeemer, to be the beggar. That he was to be of mean parentage, as to their worldly circumſtances:—that he was to be humble, abaſed, and poor, the prophets had clearly foretold. But that the heir of all things was to be a beggar, in any one ſenſe, the word can reaſonably be taken; we demand of the abettors of this commentator, to ſhew; where there is the leaſt alluſion to ſuch a ſtate in the law, —or the prophets; and then, were they able to adduce ſuch a thing, we would next require them to ſpecify, that part of his life, which proved this: ſeeing that though he complained he had no ſettled home, nor any fixt income after he left his trade, by the profits whereof, he, during the younger part of his life, probably ſupported himſelf, and his mother, after the death of Joſeph. Yet, however rejected, and ſet at nought in general by men; it cannot be ſhewn, that he ever wanted a bed when he choſe it, or the neceſſaries of life. We read of pious women, who during his public miniſtry attended him, wherever he went; with a view of diſcharging to the bleſſed Jeſus, whatever properly fell within their province, and who doubtleſs, according to their abilities, contributed to his daily wants.

The Apoſtles, for the moſt part, are called twelve poor fiſhermen, which indiſputably they were; yet it is uſual in ordinary converſation to

call a man poor, who nevertheleſs to ſupport a perſon, or cauſe which he loves, may ſpare a little. And what twelve in this reſpect gave, might eaſily accommodate the few real wants of their Divine Maſter: and even render it proper to have a ſteward, of whatever monies the holy family at times poſſeſſed. Beſides it is probable, Matthew might have ſaved ſomething in the lucrative employment he had, before he was called to be an Apoſtle, for in moſt places under government, people ſave a trifle: and of John the beloved diſciple, called by St. Mark the young man that left his linen garment, in the hands of them that were about to apprehend his maſter: of him we ſay, it is affirmed, that he had lands in Galilee, which he ſold to Caiaphas, and dwelt in his own houſe near mount Sion, by which bargain he was made known to the high prieſt, of courſe was able to introduce Peter into the houſe, at the arraignment of Jeſus.

Theſe, with many other circumſtances, in our opinion, perfectly deſtroys the ſmalleſt ſimilitude between a beggar and our Saviour. But that we may ſet the point in the fulleſt view, let us hear this writer for himſelf. After denying this to be a matter of fact, " neither ſays he, is it to be " underſtood parabolically of any particular rich " man, nor of rich men in general, though it " greatly deſcribes the characters of ſuch, at leaſt " of many of them, who only take care of their " bodies, and neglect their ſouls:—adorn and

" pamper

" pamper themſelves, live in pleaſure and grow
" wanton, having no regard to the virtuous poor.
" But ſays he, by the rich man are meant the
" Jews in general: By the beggar, is not meant
" any particular perſon, before, or in the times
" of Chriſt; nor the godly poor in common, though
" the heirs of the heavenly kingdom, are gene-
" rally ſpeaking, the poor of this world, theſe
" receive Chriſt and his Goſpel, and have their
" evil things here, and their good things here-
" after: they are now ſlighted and neglected by
" men, but ſhall hereafter have a place in Abra-
" ham's boſom, and be for ever with the Lord.
" Nor are the gentiles intended, though they may
" be ſaid to be poor and helpleſs, as they were
" without Chriſt, aliens from the common-wealth
" of Iſrael, and ſtrangers to the covenant of pro-
" miſe, without hope and God in the world;
" and were ſo deſpiſed by the Jews, as not to be
" ſuffered to come into their temple: but, conti-
" nues this Expoſitor, our Lord Jeſus Chriſt
" himſelf is here meant, which in his opinion,
" appears from the cauſe and occaſion of this pa-
" rable; viz. the deriſion of Chriſt, by the co-
" vetous Phariſees, who though high in the eſteem
" of men, were an abomination to God, and
" from the ſcope and deſign of it, which he takes
" to be a repreſentation of the mean and deſpicable
" condition of Chriſt in this world, whilſt the
" Phariſees his enemies, lived in great pomp and

" ſplendour, and the exaltation of Chriſt hereafter,
" when they would be in the utmoſt diſtreſs, and
" alſo the infidelity of that people, who continued
" in this unbelief, notwithſtanding the reſurrec-
" tion of Chriſt from the dead."

Now theſe reaſons to us by no means appear concluſive; and whether it be not allegorizing too far, let every one decide for himſelf. Nor do we judge it requiſite, to diſſect his whole account minutely, which would be no difficult taſk. As far as we know, he ſtands ſingular in this conſtruction; nor did we ever hear a preacher, who gave ſuch an interpretation of it.

In the preceding part of the chapter whence the paſſage is taken, we have the parable of the unjuſt ſteward, together with the pointed application; which the lordly Phariſees attempting to ridicule, as alſo the heavenly Speaker; our Lord lays open their true character, and ſharply reproves their hypocriſy; which often eſcapes detection here, but it obvious to the eyes of him, with whom all men have to do; and ſeeing what induces ſo many to practiſe it, is its immunity from puniſhment in this world, our Saviour looking through the flimſy pretext, is, as it were fired with a holy indignation, and exhibits to them the awful conſequences, which await that crime in particular, and impenitent ſinners in general.

Verſe

Verſe 19th. *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared ſumptuouſly every day.*

From the latin, he is commonly called Dives, which is not a proper name. It hath been aſſigned as the reaſon, why no name is given, that in a deſcription of this kind, it could have anſwered no good end: it would have provoked ſome, and gained much ill-will. This apology ſavours too much of courtlineſs, wherefore we are diſpoſed to think, Chriſt would not ſo much honour him, as to name him: although lands or houſes might bear his name, and his pride might have raiſed many memorials, which in his miſtaken apprehenſion would perpetuate it. We are told, "he was "clothed in purple and fine linen," whence ſome imagine, our Saviour glanced at Herod. We ſee no juſt grounds for this ſuppoſition. Purple was worn by the nobility, to which order, perhaps, this opulent man belonged.

The wearing of gold and ſilver with other rich ornaments; by people of high rank and quality, is ſo far from being wrong, that it is in many reſpects commendable. There is an amazing difference between elegance and grandeur in dreſs; and an immodeſt array, which expoſes the wearer to ſhame, and others to temptation. Admitting none ſhould exceed their ability, it is equally improper in thoſe to be ſlovenly, who can afford to be otherwiſe: were it for no other reaſon, than the ſupport of arts and manufactures,

factures, on which, the ſubſiſtence of the greater part of the community depends. How much preferable to expenditures on thoſe pleaſures and purſuits, which deſtroy virtue in themſelves or others; or are highly prejudicial to the intereſts of ſociety. Every man, ſhould ſtudy conſiſtency in all points, with the ſtation he holds. However faſhionable it may be, for people of rank to be worſe dreſſed than their menials, does that detract from the certain influence, which, the condition properly ſupported, would have on their inferiors?

"He fared ſumptuouſly every day." A ſweet poet hath ſung, "T'enjoy is to obey." Parſimony ariſing from the nature of our circumſtances is a virtue, but when equally attended to in affluence, it borders on the oppoſite extreme. What is contentment, ſave a limitation of our deſires to our ſituation? and happy is the man, who hath learned to be maſter of his affections and temper, under every viciſſitude. That man needs but little, nor that little long, we know, however difficult, the application of the maxim be in life. Where the Almighty hath bleſſed with abundance, there ought to be a moderate enjoyment; the denying of which to ourſelves, or thoſe that are under us, argues the want of religious principles, and ſhews a narrowneſs of ſoul, that is truly deſpicable. Real hoſpitality is oftenеſt found with ſuſceptible minds, who enjoy juſt a decent competency: and in ſpite of the ungrateful returns they may meet with,

with, from thoſe they may have moſt obliged; Providence generally rewards their diſpoſition, as he did the houſe of Obededom in bleſſing all they have. On the other hand, mark their numbers and their unpitied liſtleſsneſs, who abound, and yet ſubmit to any meanneſs, pinching themſelves, and their domeſtics in every article: whoſe ſole ſtudy from morn to night is to ſave a penny, and will grind the laborious poor, half ſtarving their little ones to do it. On no conſideration would they aſk to their table, except on the certainty of being invited to a more plentiful in return: and when they condeſcend to give you a ſeat at theirs, make a rule of preſenting you with a diſh of pretty ſpoke apologies, for the want of at leaſt one half of that, which, whether it be meat or drink, they expect to find at yours. The heart that is ſwayed by ſuch pitiful conſiderations, will never aſk the ſtranger, or relieve the diſtreſſed: and if thus ſhut towards man, can never be open towards God. The opulence of ſuch, is a curſe to ſociety, and unbleſſed to themſelves. To complete their abſurdity, they apprehend, this diſpoſition, under various pretexts, and different kinds of veils, may be concealed. Theſe, whatever pains, they coſt them to deviſe or procure, are eaſily ſeen through, by thoſe around them. Need ſuch characters wonder, that a canker-worm lurked unſeen at the root of thoſe gourds, which they ſo blindly valued? Or, that when death

ſpreads

ſpreads his cold hand over them, the money they in ſo ſqueezing a manner collected, like the one talent tied in a napkin, ſerves only to aggravate their preſent agony of ſoul, and partly inſure their future deſtruction.

Thoſe on the contrary, who really uſe, without abuſing the good things of this life, prudently keep within their incomes, and a decent regard to their children or relatives. Sooner than impeach their credit, they will ſubmit to many hardſhips, and even limit the neceſſaries of life. This is an honeſt character; whereas thoſe who will live luxurioufly, whether they ever pay or not, are worſe peſts to the community, than the robber or houſe-breaker. Doubtleſs, when a perſon of real goodneſs can ſpare with eaſe, they look about for worthy objects to beſtow it on: and rather than fail in diſtributing to thoſe that want, they will curtail their mode of living,—deny themſelves many of the pleaſures of life, nor indulge in the various diſſipations, which occupy ſo much attention. They reap more ſatisfaction from alleviating the miſeries of others, than from all that mirth or wine ever produced. Such are ſtewards indeed,—in the family of God; whoſe riches thus laid out, will terminate in heavenly treaſures.

There are others to whom riches are given, who are by no means miſers, yet totally abuſe them. Such was the rich man before us. Notwithſtanding all his enjoyments, his heart was callous to the dictates

dictates of humanity; and being of a low grovelling ſpirit, he entertained not a wiſh, beyond the gratification of his own appetites. To thoſe of this caſt, any novelty in equipage or furniture, immediately ſtrikes their fancy, nor is money grudged in the acquiſition. A ſingle device, that anſwers perhaps no one purpoſe of utility, ſhall be had at an expence, which would have made a man of genius happy for life, or a virtuous family for a year. The faſhions muſt be followed, no matter how ridiculous; and a delicate diſh,—a peculiar ſauce,—or celebrated wine—engroſſes all their converſation, and is one of the higheſt tranſports they are capable of. No vice ſo aſſimilates man to the brute as gluttony, and an epicure is a bear in human ſhape.

Riches frequently bewitch to ſome criminal purſuit or other, every mind, not ſtored with the principles of religion, and a ſenſe of the dignity of virtue. They put, as it were, a knife in a man's hand to ſlay his own ſoul, by cauſing him to forget the Almighty Giver. Witneſs the charge given to the Iſraelites, when they came to abound in Canaan, not to forget him; and owing to this, it is ſaid to be ſo hard for a rich man, intoxicated with his wealth, to enter into the kingdom of God.

Before this rich man, the poor probably were wont to bend:—this tickled him,—it always does a weak mind. But it is equally true, that the being

being pleaſed with it, argues a bad heart. Did thoſe merely rich know, with what contempt, thoſe whoſe circumſtances oblige them to bend, look upon them; they would loathe themſelves. The God of this world holds pre-eminence with all caught by his golden bait, which he himſelf, accounted to be of ſo irreſiſtible an efficacy, as induced him thereby to tempt the Son of God. The wicked, ſaith the Pſalmiſt, boaſteth of his heart's deſire, and like Nebuchadnezzar glory in their greatneſs. Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the houſe of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and the honour of my majeſty? In the heart of ſuch there is no room for God. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the ſound of the organ; they ſpend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave; therefore they ſay to God, depart from us, for we deſire not the knowledge of thy ways. Such wretches dare to ſay—What can the Almighty do for us? while at the ſame time, he is filling their houſes with good things. They fancy all their thoughts and doings are unobſerved; nor dream of the ſtrict account, to be given at a future tribunal.

Verſe 20th. *And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus; which was laid at his gate, full of ſores.*

Without diſputing about the meaning of the name, we imagine a beggar devout and well known

known is intended. This man appeared as miſerable, as the former ſeemed happy. He was reduced to the laſt extremity. His body like that of Job was full of ſores. To be of a weakly conſtitution is a continual ſource of uneaſineſs; but to have ulcers, implied more grievous pains to himſelf, and greater loathſomeneſs to others. He was not able to come of himſelf, being either ſick or lame: like many beggars in our own day, he had no pariſh work houſe to go to, therefore was carried from door to door. Thoſe that laſt carried him, perhaps could not relieve him, but brought him to a houſe, where one dwelt, that could if he would. Poor man! he was forced to beg his bread, and be ſatisfied with what he could get at other people's doors.

'Tis not every Lavinia that meets with a Palemon as generous as rich; nor every ſuppliant at a great man's gate, who meets with relief. Tell me not the awkward excuſe:—they might give on that ſuppoſition their fortunes away, and that many aſk, who do not deſerve:—I demand,—Are the opulent in general, at proper pains to diſtinguiſh the meritorious? or when this obtrudes itſelf upon their attention, are they ready to aſſiſt?

Perhaps Lazarus had known better days, and felt extatic pleaſure in driving wants away:—his hands had liberally given, nor did his heart repine, ſave that what he gave was ſtill ſo far beneath his wiſh. His ſoul imbued with every grace, always

deviſed the moſt diſintereſted things. Now O ſad reverſe of fortune,—doomed to feel himſelf in truth, the poor penſioner on the bounties of an hour, his feelings are tortured with the recollection of happier *times*. Nothing but religion rooted in the heart, could at this period ſupport him. Call not this ye worldlings,—whoſe opinions are grounded on firſt views a judgment; for it is our heavenly Father's pleaſure, that it ſhould often be the fate of the worthieſt hearts, who always melted at another's woe, to be greatly afflicted in this world; while vicious, illiterate, infamous wretches wallow in abundance. It is true, he is wretched, but not forſaken of his God.—He wants bread,—but hath the teſtimony of an approving conſcience.

Verſe 21ſt. *And deſiring to be fed with the crumbs, which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his ſores.*

Senſibility, what muſt be thy pangs, when reduced to aſk a pittance from the hands of thoſe, whoſe fathers, thou wouldſt once have diſdained to ſet with the dogs of thy flocks? Far from aſking a proper meſs, though many ſuch were given to the hounds, or allowed to putrify, rather than be ſuitably bequeathed, he modeſtly begged the crumbs, that fell from his table, which pampered lacquies were wont to ſweep away.

How frequently does it happen, that if the maſter is bad, the ſervants are worſe? Thoſe creatures whoſe coats hang only on them by the day; inſtead

inſtead of carefully ſaving the ſuperfluities, and tenderly giving them to needy objects, whoſe prayers might bring down heavenly bleſſings, either ſuffer them to waſte, or ſell them privately to ſupport their own extravagance. With an inſolence bordering on brutality, they will drive the needy from the gate. We grant many beg from idleneſs, —ſome from lucrative motives,—and with others, it is the effect of their imprudence. After all, there are numbers of really good people, who by a train of unavoidable accidents, are reduced to it. Many a favourite of Heaven, hath been expoſed to equal want with Lazarus.

Should the remark of David be urged, He never ſaw the righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread; we reply—it might be ſo under that diſpenſation, for the promiſes of that Covenant were earthly; beſides, there was not to be a beggar in Iſrael, and ſo induſtrious are they, that but few of them, are beggars in any age or clime. Sooner than ſubmit to this, they will contrive a thouſand ways to cheat Chriſtians. A good man may be poor from the neglect and extravagance of his parents. He may be ſo, for lack of worldly wiſdom, or ſkill to watch the lucky hits, as they are called. In this ſenſe the children of this world are often wiſer, than the children of light. Many are reduced to poverty by fire,—by thieves,—or through want of ſuitable encouragement. God

permits ſuch things to befall his own children, though he invariably over-rules it for their good.

We are not informed, by what means the perſon here ſpoke of, became ſo poor as to beg. Perhaps the fall had been great. He might have been delicately brought up, the pride of a father's heart, and the joy of her that bore him. His mind improved by education, doubled the ſorrows he felt, on being reduced to aſk that charity, he once hoped never to have needed. But he murmurs not, for God is the ſtrength of his heart. True happineſs lies far remote, from the abundance of earthly things, which a man poſſeſſeth. As the will of the Almighty alone had made Lazarus poor, he in ſubſtance ſaid, what our Lord moſt emphatically pronounced afterwards, on a much more ſolemn and important occaſion:—The cup my Father gives me to drink, ſhall I not drink of it?

What was the conduct of this rich man towards him? he ſlighted him, perhaps reproached him, or ſpoke harſhly to him. The beggar's lameneſs was his advocate, his ſores were monitors, but impenetrable was the heart of this deſpicable worldling: though no gueſt at his table, not all under his unhallowed roof, equalled in real value, him, whom they thus ſpurned. What will ſuch characters anſwer, when the Supreme Judge of quick and dead, ſhall from his tremendous throne, urge to their inexpreſſible conſternation? I the Lord of worlds, in the perſons of my followers, was

was hungry, and you gave me no meat;—naked, and you clothed me not;—ſick, and you viſited me not. Had you to their extreme neceſſities adminiſtered a cup of cold water, it verily ſhould not have been unrewarded.

The brutes were kinder than their maſter; for the dogs came and licked his ſores, which mollified and eaſed them. Whether they were of the domeſtic kind, or part of a pack kept for pleaſure; depend on it, they were well fed, while Lazarus is allowed to ſtarve.

Verſe 22d. *And it came to paſs, that the beggar died; and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's boſom: the rich man alſo died, and was buried.*

Worn out by fatigue, and pain, and want; with ſerene compoſure, perhaps without a witneſs, under ſome hedge, or in the ſtreet, this beggar yields to nature's claim. He dies. From the world he had met with hard uſage;—'tis now over,—no more can it vilify,—hate,—or perſecute him. No more can ſinners grieve, or vex his holy ſpirit. The ſins of the wicked, are the ſorrows of the righteous: the evil and ſcandalous lives of profeſſors, is no ſmall affliction to them. Paul exclaims,—Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, they are enemies to the croſs of Chriſt. Inward corruption makes them cry out,—Oh wretched men that we are, who ſhall deliver us from this body of ſin and death? Nor does the grand adverſary ceaſe to per-

plex, by the ſubtlety of his temptations. Sometimes their own children, add much to the poignancy of their woe: — worldly cares and bodily diſtempers afflict them:—and the Almighty hides his face from them. At laſt, through free grace and the atoning blood of Jeſus, they get above all this. It was an advantage to Lazarus to be hid in the grave, where the weary are at reſt, and the wicked ceaſe from troubling. Mark the end of the perfect man! for it is peace and triumph. He who by the humane was carried from door to door, now has an heavenly convoy. In the chariot of love he rode, and Angels were the guard that attended him. He that was ſet at nought by men, is now by miniſtring ſpirits welcomed to the ſkies: and inſtead of the ſcornful taunts of ill-gotten wealth, or abandoned characters, now hears only the gladſome acclamations of thoſe, who inhabit manſions of eternal glory, and on whoſe lips Hoſannas never die.

When a good man dies, companies of Angels, like thoſe round Eliſha, bear him through regions otherwiſe unſafe, and till then unknown. If the air, as ſome think, be the region of devils, they muſt ſee the triumph;—envy it;—but dare not,—cannot impede the journey,—or ſully it. O ye aſcending ſpirits of the Juſt made perfect, what a ſplendid retinue is yours!—Each ſtep you take enlarges your capacities, and preſents objects adequate to them. Of Seſoſtris the monarch of Egypt,

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it is recorded, that his chariot was drawn by kings, but what was that honour compared with yours,—ye heirs of free ſalvation! Siſter ſpirit, ſay thoſe heavenly bands, come away, leave theſe robes of mortality,—haſte through the yielding air,—and behold thy Saviour in his native glories.

As to the body of the poor man we hear nothing. For the ſake of humanity we hope it was buried, though ſome have imagined it was caſt into a hole, where dogs gnawed the bones of him, whoſe ſores they had licked. Be that as it may, not an atom of his precious duſt ſhall be loſt. The God he ſerved will raiſe it up again, far more glorious and divine.

By Abraham's boſom is meant Heaven. When the Jews ſpeak of the happineſs of another, they were wont to expreſs it, by their having gone to Abraham, the father of all the faithful, of whatever age, clime, or denomination among men.

Lazarus died before the rich man, for the good generally go firſt. We are told the rich man alſo died, and was buried. Whether he was called by ſudden death, or a ſlow lingering diſeaſe, Scripture doth not ſay,—if we ſuppoſe the latter,—what an attendance upon him?—conſultations among phyſicians?—preſcriptions,—formalities,—and inquiries took place? There muſt be no noiſe, for fear of diſturbing him;—he muſt only eat and drink this and that, in ſuch a quantity, and at ſuch a time. The air muſt be regulated for his ſake;

and all in the houſe tread ſoftly on account of him. The greateſt delicacies for the ſenſes, and the richeſt cordials, or the moſt powerful reſtoratives, are procured for him. In fine, Nature for a while, is as it were ſupported by art. All will not do,—duſt thou art, and unto duſt thou muſt return. Many a longing wiſhful look he caſts behind,—was pleaſed with every adulation of his recovery, becauſe the love of life prevailed, and the unknown region beyond the grave, at times harrowed up his mind. But ſee,—he breathes his laſt. A pompous funeral no doubt he had. Hundreds looked out at their windows to ſee the mutes,—the nodding plume,—the ſlow-moving hearſe, and the elegant mourning of thoſe who attended. Granting the above was not the mode of interment then,—ſomething ſimilar in the way of grandeur took place,—and multitudes flocked to ſee artificial grief, repreſented in the dreſs of man and beaſt; and the other various appendages, in the mighty buſtle of laying duſt to duſt. Idle pageantry!—could his ſoul at that period have addreſſed thoſe concerned;—Oh! the aſtoniſhing language it would have ſpoke.

Verſe 23d. *And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and ſeeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his boſom.*

Riches!—O the millions you have ruined! are theſe the winding paths of deception, by which to ſuch dreadful chambers you lead? How different

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the convoy of the ſoul and that of the body? We have heard where Lazarus was carried,—now we learn where the rich man was. "In hell he lift "up his eyes." Scripture teaches,—That the ſoul of the faithful, immediately after being delivered from the priſon of the clay, goes into bleſſedneſs; ſo unſanctified ſouls are in endleſs torments: for in conformity, to what we conceive to be the language of revelation on this point, when we ſpeak of theſe, we ſhall do it in this manner. The doctrine hath lately been much litigated, but while we neither arraign, nor condemn others for thinking as they ſee cauſe, we crave the ſame liberty.

This rich man had entirely devoted himſelf to worldly pleaſures, conſequently was unqualified for pure intellectual joys. He had been inflexible to the cries of the poor, therefore the Omnipotent, now deals to him judgment without mercy; by making him feel the intenſeſt tortures, of an irreparable condition. Happy would he now be, at the moſt diſtant proſpect, of any poſſible chance, which might ſcreen him from the wrath of the Lamb.

His miſery is aggravated, from the ſight of Lazarus afar off. He had probably never thought of him, ſince he ſaw him ſit at the gate. Our Saviour ſpeaking of the future ſtate of the wicked, uſes a ſimilar figure, when he tells them, Ye ſhall ſee Abraham, and Iſaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets

prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourſelves thruſt out *. This miſerable man beholds the beatitude of one, whom he had once diſdained. How many in that place of torment, will be under equally painful ſenſations in perceiving thoſe in Paradiſe, whom they derided upon earth, or injured merely, becauſe they could not reſent it, or procure redreſs?

Rejoice ye righteous on your celeſtial thrones; —nor can you complain of the thorny paſſage to your bright abodes. If we are warranted in ſuppoſing, the wicked grieved at the happineſs of the righteous, muſt not the latter be in equal proportion tranſported with their own felicity, on beholding the puniſhment of the former. To this add, the extremity of their anguiſh; Who knows, ſays Moſes, the power of thine anger, even according to thy fear ſo is thy wrath. Of bodily pains we have conceptions, however unable to comprehend the meaſures of infinite wrath. All which the body can ſuffer here, may be abated by medicine, or fortitude of mind: or by the ſympathy of friends, and aſſiduity of acquaintance; whereas in the place of puniſhment, after the reſurrection, both ſoul and body ſhall be equally tormented, without any mixture of mercy, or mitigation of pain, ſeeing, there they have ſorrow without joy, pain without intermiſſion, darkneſs without light,

* Luke xiii. 28.

and horrors for ever and ever. Should it be aſked, what is it, that ſo peculiarly torments. We anſwer, Conſcience is the worm that dies not. Now they cry,—What fools have we been? What a God have we incenſed? What a Saviour have we rejected? What a Heaven we have loſt?

Each will thus piteouſly addreſs himſelf or herſelf. O my ſoul—what pangs have I intailed on thee? 'Tis true, I ſlighted all reproof, whether from Providence, or the written word. I even dared to throw my poor jeſts on Divine Revelation;—in common converſation imprecated that damnation which I am enduring;—vilified as far as in me lay the character of the Redeemer, and conſidered all he had ſaid or done as a fable, nor deemed all exertions to defend it, to be any thing more, than the exerciſe of a trade, which his miniſters were obliged to ſupport, becauſe they were paid for it. For the love I had to the baſe luſts of my heart, is all this evil come upon me:—my ſecret uncleanneſs,—my varniſhed pride,—my concealed envy or malice,—my concern for a preſent, more than a coming world,—and hypocritical hopes, have made the recollection of time, the agony of eternity.

Shame will cover them, for ſaith the ſacred word: The wicked ſhall riſe to ſhame and everlaſting contempt. Should one born to a crown loſe it for a trifle, durſt he ever among men ſhew his face again? Did I, ſays the drunkard, from an immo-

immoderate attachment to levity, and the dupes of unmeaning mirth; firſt allow intoxication to ſteal upon me, till habituated to it, I ceaſed to be aſhamed of it; or maddened with it, plunged into numberleſs other vices, for the commiſſion whereof, in the ſubſequent moments of reflection I abhorred myſelf. My vain heart, another will ſay, was lifted up, becauſe hereditary honours ſtuck thick upon me, and I regarded thoſe beneath me, as only made to pleaſe and ſerve me. My acquiſition of riches urges a third, in which I placed all my confidence, engroſſing my affections, left no room for Chriſt, and the truths of his Goſpel. The vain and phantaſtical in bitterneſs acknowledge, that adorning their perſon, ſetting it off to the beſt advantage, which never returned more than the admiration of fools, ſo abſorbed them, that they never dreamed about their immortal part. Here the Atheiſt feels the wrath of a derided God,—and all infidels, eſpecially thoſe ſitting under the Goſpel diſpenſation, ſhall know, what it is to ſpurn at a Saviour in his perſon, nature, character, or offices. He himſelf hath expreſsly ſaid: He that believeth not the Son, ſhall not ſee life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Could it procure a momentary reſpite, the perſecutor would chearfully fall at the feet of thoſe, in whoſe innocent blood he imbrued his hands. The backſlider, finds it would have been better not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than again to turn from

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the holy commandment, delivered unto him. All unrenewed perſons are experimentally convinced, that neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor revilers, nor extortioners, or whoſoever loveth and maketh a lie, ſhall enter into the New Jeruſalem.

In a word, whatever ſpecies of guilt may have conſigned them there, the deepeſt remorſe muſt penetrate their ſouls; but ah! cries and tears no longer can avail. Deſpair ſeals the ceaſeleſs, and unpitied groan. Hope, that ſuccours the moſt wretched in a preſent ſtate, is a ſtranger in theſe dark domains. Beſides, there are furies deſtined to torment them, ſince the devils themſelves will uſe their ſuperior power; to render if poſſible more wretched, the very individuals they ſtrove to bring there: and among their fellow-creatures, keen will be the reproaches, which ſome may give. It was you who brought me to this curſed place, by artfully enticing me to this, or the other ſin. You ſeduced my virgin heart, and by cloſe diſſimulation, had violated my virtue, ere I ſuſpected your deſign: and then taught me to look ſlightly on that, which was no more to be regained. Your wit and humour, led me aſtray:—your impure converſation cut the ſtrength of my principles, and opened the door to vice. What avails it here, that general example too readily ſupported you, or that weak minds thought you clever? You got wealth by

by deceit, nor ſcrupled teaching the methods, by which you got it. Theſe, with many other kinds of accuſation, will be ſharper to the mind, than a two-edged ſword.

Verſe 24th. *And he cried, and ſaid, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and ſend Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.*

He that would not ſpare the crumbs that fell from his table to the needy, hath little title to compaſſion. He that on earth ſpoke with harſhneſs to all beneath him, begs in a louder tone, than ever Lazarus aſked for alms at his gate. He calls the Patriarch father. There are many there, who according to the fleſh, were proud of their deſcent from him, notwithſtanding John had guarded them againſt this,—And think not to ſay within yourſelves: We have Abraham to our father, for I ſay unto you, that God is able of theſe ſtones to raiſe up children unto Abraham *. A greater than him, reproved them for the ſame error. They anſwered, and ſaid unto him, Abraham is our father: Jeſus ſaith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham †. And whoſoever wiſhes the beſt expoſition on this topic, let him conſult the third chapter of the Epiſtle to the Galatians; the concluſion whereof is, If ye be Chriſt's, then are ye Abraham's

* Matth. iii. 9. † John viii. 39.

ſeed,

ſeed, and heirs according to the promiſe. Whether under the Law, or under the Goſpel, it is in vain to truſt to any thing that betters not the heart. For in Jeſus Chriſt, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion, but faith which worketh by love *.

Let us attend to his requeſt. "Send Lazarus." Plato, in deſcribing the torments of the wicked, ſays, they are continually raving on thoſe, whom they have murdered, or been any way injurious to, calling upon them to forgive the wrongs they did them. Here he begs a favour, and courts the feelings of him, who when on earth he thought unworthy of a morſel of bread: Even that he would dip the tip of his finger in water; the phraſeology is in alluſion, to the purifications among the Jews, and the ſprinkling of blood by the finger of the high prieſt. The end of the requeſt is, to cool my tongue, with which ſome think he had blaſphemed God, or grievouſly offended by lying, ſwearing, obſcene talking, or backbiting. Even ſo, the tongue is a little member, and boaſteth great things. Behold how great a matter, a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity †. So is the tongue amongſt our members, that it defileth the whole body, and ſetteth on fire the courſe of nature; and it is ſet on fire of hell. Conſider this, ye, whoſe mouths are full of

* Gal. v. 6. † James iii. 5, 6.

oaths

oaths and imprecations, on yourſelves and others; who never employ them as inſtruments of prayer, or praiſe. Think of him who ſaid, " for I am tormented in this flame."

Verſe 25th. *But Abraham ſaid, Son, remember, that thou in thy life time receivedſt thy good things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things, bnt now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

The Patriarch calls him ſon,—a kind appellation in itſelf,—which here ſerved to aggravate the denial of his requeſt. He had been a rebellious one, and was now a finally diſinherited one. " Remember,"—this is a cutting word. Dreadful condition, never to underſtand its ſpiritual import, till in the infernal regions. What oil to the flame does memory then bring? in recalling to idea their riches,—honours,—and pleaſures:—their miſapplied talents, which inſtead of being laid out for the Giver, by inflating their pride, have accumulated their guilt, and led to ſwifter perdition:—their loſt time, and neglected means of ſalvation. How earneſtly are ſinners called upon, to remember their Creator in the days of their youth?—to live mindful of death,—and to prepare for eternity; but drowned in diſſipation, and the ſlaves of vice, they hear and underſtand not; or they pretend, and do not. Many external warnings unite with the internal monitor, in ſupplicating mankind not to be deſtroyers of themſelves. What an awful ſound in mortal ears, to be

be told by the judge of quick and dead?—Remember the alluring offers of peace and pardon, made to thee; during prolonged years, denied to others. How long did I extend my merciful arms, to you a gainſaying and diſobedient people?

Says Abraham in the caſe before us: "Remember that thou in thy life time receivedſt thy good things," even many divine ordinances and privileges, whereof thou madeſt no proper uſe. Alſo, what a bountiful benefactor the Almighty hath been to thee! how patiently he bore with thy follies, and with unparalleled long ſuffering, delayed his vengeance on thy crimes?—Didſt ever thou attempt a grateful return?—Thou waſt the grave of divine bleſſings, wherein they were buried, not the field in which they were ſown. Didſt thou not live, as if no account was to be given? On the ſureſt principles of equity, doth this refuſal ſtand.

What were all theſe heavenly things bartered for? Why for the mean gratifications of pride, ſenſe, and ambition. Theſe were thy conſolation, the penny thou didſt agree for, and thou haſt got it. What an animated deſcription the book of Job gives of ſuch men? That they live, become old, yea, are mighty in power. Their ſeed is eſtabliſhed in their ſight with them, and their offſpring before their eyes. Their houſes are ſafe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not, their cow

calveth, and caſteth not her calf. They ſend forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the ſound of the organ. They ſpend their days in wealth. From ſuch David prays to be delivered, From men which are by thy ſword O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whoſe belly thou filleſt with thy hid treaſure, they are full of children, and leave the reſt of their ſubſtance to their babes. *

Remember too, what evil things Lazarus received. What a large portion of the miſeries incident to humanity he felt:—afflicted in body, without a penny or a home, none to attend him, and ſcarce any to pity him. All which he firmly ſuſtained, becauſe infinite wiſdom willed it thus. Affliction is a fiery furnace:—what then? if he that walks with us in it be the Son of God: muſt it not lead to real honour and higher exaltation. Thou minded the preſent,—Lazarus regarded the end. By contraſting theſe two:—mark the equity of the divine procedure, ſeeing it is a righteous thing with God, to recompenſe tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled reſt with us. † Death opens heaven to the ſaint, and hell to the ſinner: while the one ſings for joy of heart, the other howls for vexation of ſpirit. Ye children of duſt, who are heirs of grace, what

* Pſ. xvii. 14. † 2 Theſſ. vii. 14.

though

though your pilgrimage was in much meanneſs and poverty:—what, though you were loaded with calumny, or ſuffered the hatred and perſecution of men, if through countleſs ages, you are comforted with the ſoul ſatisfying raptures, originating from the beatific viſions of the Almighty?

Verſe 26th. *And beſides all this, between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed: ſo that they, which would paſs from hence to you cannot; neither can they paſs to us, that would come from thence.*

A commentator already alluded to, ſeems as totally wide of the truth on this verſe, as in his explication of the whole paſſage. He even quotes Eccleſiaſtes, vii. 14. wherein is this clauſe, God alſo hath ſet the one over againſt the other, as if that had the leaſt alluſion to hell and paradiſe. In our opinion, the diſtance between the two is ſcarce greater, than between the obvious meaning of the whole verſe, and any ſuch conſtruction.

It is reaſonable to imagine, and we believe from the tenor of revelation, that there really is no communication between the inhabitants of the bliſsful, and of the infernal regions: though, if the paſſage we are illuſtrating, be a matter of fact, it proves the contrary, and admitting it to be a parable, ſome ſtrong inferences, on that hypotheſis, might be adduced. Did ever our Saviour in any of his parables, uſe ſimilitudes or ſuppoſitions not to be found in nature, or which were in themſelves impoſſible? When the Sadducees tempting

him, aſked that queſtion, about whoſe wife in the reſurrection the woman ſhould be, that had been married to ſeven brothers; he reprimands their folly, by telling them, that in that glorious ſtate, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven:—whence we infer, that in the change which theſe vile bodies ſhall undergo at the reſurrection, the grounds of all earthly connections or attachments, will be put off, together with the other impurities and droſs, from which we ſhall be cleanſed. The preciſe meaning of the words then, we conceive to be, that none in heaven wiſh to viſit thoſe on the other ſide the gulf; and that however ſtrongly any there, might deſire to come to heaven, they cannot. The enraptured tenants of the place are otherwiſe employed. Ceaſeleſs adoration of the Lamb, from whoſe blood by grace, their robes have derived their whiteneſs, employs every faculty, and confines every view. Neither can the moſt daring ſinner force his way; ſeeing the door of mercy is for ever ſhut, and they are in a pit, out of which there is no redemption. By infinite power this gulph is fixed, which myriads of angels cannot move. Immortal thanks to our dear Redeemer, there is none ſo placed between a ſtate of nature, and a ſtate of grace: it being in every man's power under the Goſpel, or who makes the beſt uſe he can of the means given, and the light afforded him, by repentance and integrity of heart

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and life, to paſs from the one to the other. Whereas, if we die in our ſins, what might have been prevented in time, cannot be remedied in eternity.

Verſe 27th. *Then he ſaid, I pray thee therefore, Father, that thou wouldſt ſend him to my father's houſe.*

In this verſe, their vain deſires are deſcribed, who tempted God in the neglect of his ordinances, and the ordinary means of grace, requiring, what his infinite wiſdom hath not thought proper to grant; even miracles, or a teſtimony from the dead, to perſuade them, of what there is already in the ſcriptures, ſufficient evidence for, and which but for the hardneſs of their hearts, they would believe; as others far more intelligent and diſcerning, have not entertained the leaſt heſitation in doing.

All is finiſhed reſpecting himſelf, and on that head his mouth is for ever ſhut; yet having the opportunity of ſpeaking to Abraham, he offers another importunate requeſt. There was a time, when he might have aſked every thing, eſſentially conducive to preſent peace and future happineſs of Abraham's God: now he calls, when there is none to anſwer favourably. He prays to inflexible juſtice, who deſpiſed the offers of richeſt mercy. Wilt thou ſend him to that houſe, where he was ſo unkindly treated? Though there can be no alleviation of my miſery, may not that of others

be prevented? Might it not be ſtrongly argued from hence, that natural affection in ſome mode ſubſiſts in a future ſtate? or muſt we reſolve it ſimply into this, that he dreaded the enhancement of his miſeries from their accuſations, if they came into that place?

Verſe 28th. *For I have five brethren, that he may teſtify unto them, leſt they alſo come into this place of torment.*

Some have here remarked the probability of his having no children, elſe he would have mentioned them, conſequently, his churliſhneſs to Lazarus, was the more inexcuſable. Five brethren I humbly conceive they were, in oppoſition to all that Teelmannus, and his implicit follower have urged, about its meaning, the children of Iſrael coming out of Egypt by fives: or any ſubſequent diviſion of them in later periods:—or to the captivity of the ten tribes,—or any ſuch abſurd conceptions whatever. The words literally denote perſons, and may have been the requeſt of thouſands, ſince that period. He knew their temper, their ignorance, their infidelity, and wiſhed to prevent the deſtruction, into which they were running. How ſeriouſly would he now, were it in his power, admoniſh theſe; whom perhaps he had ſeduced into many wicked paths? What ideas of ſin muſt the ſoul have, that is ſuffering its juſt demerits? But as theſe cannot be communicated by himſelf, he deſires that Lazarus might be ſent to them,

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hoping they would recollect him, — believe his words,—and by their attention, in ſome meaſure atone for the inhoſpitality, wherewith he had formerly been treated.

The purport was to be, that he may teſtify unto them: that is, preach and exhort. And with many other words did he teſtify and exhort, ſaying, ſave yourſelves from this untoward generation. * As if he had ſaid:—Let him inform them of what a deplorable condition I am in:—let him aſſure them, that there is an Omnipotent God, who will by no means clear the guilty, but executes the hotteſt vengeance on all the workers of iniquity, who die in their ſins. No longer let them caſt their impious ridicule on ſacred things, or truly religious perſons, however low their circumſtances. No more let them live to themſelves, but fly to the mercy of God through the Saviour. Tell them for every thought, word, and work, they muſt be brought to judgment:—awful reflection!—too ſoon it cannot have the aſcendancy in their breaſt. Let them haſte to ſhun every appearance of evil: to guard each avenue to the heart by fervent prayer and holy circumſpection:—nor be partakers of other men's ſins, by enticing them, whether by precept or example, into any one forbidden thing. His own conſciouſneſs of guilt in this reſpect, inclined him to

* Acts. ii. 40.

attempt, preventing the bitter cup being put into their hands; of courſe he adds, " leſt they come into this place of torment."

Verſe 29th. *Abraham ſaith unto him, They have Moſes, and the prophets, let them hear them.*

It was ſhrewdly ſaid on this verſe by a pious divine,—That thoſe who make the rich man's praying to Abraham, a juſtification of their praying to departed Saints, are far to ſeek for proofs, when the practice of ſuch a wretch ſtands for an example, and have but little encouragement to follow it, ſeeing all his entreaties were uſeleſs. Abraham leaves them, for whom he expreſſed ſo much concern, to the ordinary means of grace among the Jews. Their privilege was to have that ſure word of prophecy, and their duty was to believe it,—to love it, and apply it, to all the uſes, for which it was bequeathed.

Moreover, doth not this ſpeech of the Patriarch's imply; that there was ſufficient evidence of a future ſtate in the Moſaic diſpenſation, that being the main point, which the miſerable man wiſhed his brethren to be impreſſed with. Hence we may alſo learn, what a bleſſing it is, to have the written word of God?—'Tis true, the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament ſheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth ſpeech, and night unto night ſheweth knowledge. There is no ſpeech or language, where their voice is not heard. For the inviſible things of him from the beginning of

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the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made. After all, it is Revelation alone, which makes the Redeemer known. Hereon, the Apoſtle reſts the ſuperiority of the Jews, over the Gentiles; becauſe unto them were committed the oracles of God. He ſhewed his word unto Jacob, his ſtatutes and his judgments unto Iſrael, He hath not dealt ſo with any nation: ſaith David, Pſalm cxlvii. 19, 20.

The Old Teſtament bore witneſs of the Redeemer, elſe he himſelf in the days of his fleſh would never have ſaid: Search the ſcriptures, for they teſtify of me. Moſes not only in a variety of ways pointed unto; but expreſly ſpoke of Chriſt. The law in its ſeveral parts, with the concomitant rites and ceremonies, were ſhadows of better things to come: the oblations and ſacrifices held him forth, and the prophets ſpake of him in almoſt every particular; yet it was a dark diſpenſation, compared with the brightneſs of Goſpel day. Well might our Saviour urge to the diſciples, Many prophets and kings deſired to ſee thoſe things which ye ſee, and have not ſeen them; and to hear thoſe things, which you hear, and have not heard them. * That is, to ſee the veil taken off, and the glory of God ſhining forth in the miniſtrations of the Goſpel. Moſes, and the prophets, were until John, after which, in theſe laſt days,

* Luke x. 24.

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the Almighty hath ſpoken to us by his ſon, whoſe holy doctrine, together with what he hath done and ſuffered, he commanded to be written; that men might know Jeſus is the Chriſt, and that believing, they might have life through his name. Every thing eſſential to ſalvation is revealed in the word, though not ſpiritually underſtood, till the Holy Spirit opens them up to us, and prepares our hearts for the reception of them: therefore it is a ſufficient, and the only rule of faith and practice: being profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for inſtruction in righteouſneſs, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works.

Juſtly then did the patriarch refer them to theſe, though the unhappy Being fooliſhly thought, his brethren would be cured of their infidelity, if one roſe from the dead. Was not this of a piece with their conduct, who aſked our Lord,—What ſign ſheweſt thou, that we may believe on thee, as if the miracles he wrought, were not a full atteſtation of his divinity? They refuſed the waters of Shiloh that ſoftly flowed; while they rejoiced in Rezin and Remaliah's ſon. In leſs figurative terms, they eſteemed the inſpired page as a ſmall or contemptible brook, and rather adhered to the proud notions of aſſuming profeſſors: ſaying with Naaman the Syrian, in another caſe;—Are not Abana and Pharphar rivers of Damaſcus, better than all the rivers of Iſrael?

Verſe

Verſe 30th. *And he ſaid, Nay, Father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

Here we find him preſſing his requeſt, from the novelty of the circumſtance with the natural horror attending it. He knew his brethren were a rebellious and ſtiff-necked ſet; diſregarding Moſes and the prophets; notwithſtanding all their outward boaſt of them; but if one went from the dead, the miſerable man dares affirm, they will repent, as if repentance was merely an act of the human will, independent of its being the gift of God. In this he purſued his old tract of oppoſing his fancies, to the inſtitutions of divine appointment. How many hazard their immortal ſouls, rather than part with their own perverted ideas, and favourite, perhaps only, becauſe ſingular, and heterogeneous ſyſtems? Do not ſuch put their imperfect wiſdom, in contradiction to the divine? as if they could better plan or advance human happineſs than the Creator, forgetting the important, and creature humbling queſtion: Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counſellor?

Verſe 31ſt. *And he ſaid unto him, If they hear not Moſes and the prophets, neither will they be perſuaded, though one roſe from the dead.*

He that refuſes to hear the Spirit of God ſpeaking clearly, and authoritatively in revelation, by the mouths of holy and inſpired men; will not believe

believe in any individual, pretending he came from the dead; and telling what the wicked ſuffer there: ſeeing, it is preſumptuous to ſuppoſe, any will aſſent to a creature, who cannot reſt aſſured, in the infallible teſtimony of God himſelf. With the greateſt truth and propriety, the Patriarch declares, that he who doubts of Revelation, conſidering how it is ſupported, will alſo heſitate, reſpecting any proofs, which can be offered to his ſenſes. Speculative minds have in this, and many paſt ages pretended, that the only reaſon why they diſcredited revelation, was the feeble and inadequate nature of its evidences. It is eaſy to ſhut one's eyes againſt the light, or for any one, who hath not ſeriouſly, or candidly examined, thoſe already adduced and eſtabliſhed, to call for more. Permit us to aſk, in caſes of juſtice amongſt men, is this allowed? No. Then why wink at, or tolerate a fault of the higheſt conſequence, to the well-being of the ſoul through all eternity, as one reprobating the authority of ſcripture muſt be, which would be refuted, in any well-formed court on earth?

The divine authority of ſcripture hath employed ſo many able pens, and the argument hath been diſcuſſed in ſo maſterly a manner, both by the fathers, and modern writers, that did not the verſe before us, render ſaying a few things almoſt unavoidable, it might have paſſed in ſilence.

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The articles revealed in their eſſential grandeur and importance, tend not a little to prove they are divine. And this, whether we view the myſteries contained in them :—the accurate hiſtory of creation, which they give :—with the moſt ſatisfactory account of the introduction of moral evil, which they contain :—and a minute deſcription of the ſole, and ample, and glorious remedy provided againſt it, by the wiſdom, and goodneſs of the Supreme Being, in the ſending of his own Son into this our world. From their antiquity, the writings of Moſes claim our attention; being the moſt ancient by far that have come down to us, nay, by many ſuppoſed to be the firſt in the world, to deny which, according to the quaint expreſſion of a late divine, is to ſuppoſe that the devil ſet up his chapel, before God built his Church.

The ſublime, peculiar, and inimitable ſtyle of the ſcriptures, with the majeſty of the Spirit ſpeaking in, and through them, far ſurpaſſing the poliſh and dignity of all other human compoſitions, evidently beſpeak their divine original. The ſpirit of holineſs in heart and life, ſuperior to the moſt animated inculcations of a like nature, in all other ages or ſyſtems, plainly lead to that pure ſource whence they ſpring. Nor doth the perfect agreement and harmony pervading thoſe pages; leſs eſtabliſh their divinity, ſince though written by different perſons, of various conditions in life,—in ſeveral places,—and in different languages, yet

every

every part ſo coinciding with the other, and all ſupporting and forming the moſt regular and beautiful whole, as no art, or ſubtlety of man could deviſe.

The credit and ſincerity of the writers, prove the work to be of God. Some of them being kings, and of the profoundeſt wiſdom; conſequently, not likely to invent lies, or be guilty of a forgery. On the other hand, many of the prophets, and almoſt all the Apoſtles were illiterate men, of courſe, incapable of laying ſo deep a contrivance to delude mankind; eſpecially, when we reflect, that by ſo doing, inſtead of having the motives of intereſt or ambition on their ſide, they bade adieu to theſe, and expoſed their lives in the attempt. The punctual accompliſhment of the prophecies, is the prerogative of God alone. Let them bring forth, ſaith the Almighty, by the prophet Iſaiah; what ſhall happen, or ſhew us things that are to come hereafter, that we may believe them. In honour of the Divine Lawgiver, let us remark, the exact fulfillment of one, near 2000 years after it was made. When Herod a ſtranger, and of another nation, had cut off from the government of the Jews, the houſe and line of Judah in the perſon of Hyrcanus, whom he ſlew, then, and at that very appointed time Shiloh came, of whom it had been ſaid, that to him the gathering of the people ſhould be.

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When God, ſaith a learned writer, gives miracles in the confirmation of any word or doctrine, he owns it to be of, and from himſelf; thereby ſetting the fulleſt evidence, or ſeal to it; which men are capable of receiving, or diſcerning. Let infidelity do its utmoſt, and we are perſuaded nothing has been left unſaid, that the greateſt ardor in that cauſe could ſuggeſt, the miracles wrought by our bleſſed Lord, while on earth, cannot be refuted by all the power of devils, or craft of men. And the power of working them did not ceaſe,—nay the duration of them is almoſt incredible, if we liſten to Irenæus, who lived near two hundred years after Chriſt, yet declares, they were not over in his time; but that in the name of Chriſt, the dead were raiſed, and devils caſt out.

The wonderful preſervation of the oracles of truth, amidſt ſuch viciſſitudes, and imminent hazards for ſo many ages, in which every ſpecies of literature, hath loſt ſome of its brighteſt gems; is no mean argument for their heavenly origin. Add to this, the amazing ſucceſs wherewith the preaching of the Goſpel hath been attended, and the efficacy its tenets have had on the hearts and lives of men, who once were their bittereſt enemies, and acted moſt in oppoſition to them. This we grant, ſuppoſes, the inward witneſs of the Spirit, accompanying them.

Next turn to the holy Army of Martyrs. Did they all believe an error, and die for a fraud?

There is not the leaſt ground for ſuch a conjecture. Their adhering to the word of God, in ſpite of all human allurements or threatenings,—or actual ſufferings of the cruelleſt tortures, is a proof of the veracity of thoſe principles, for which they ſo chearfully laid down their lives. No weapon ever formed againſt the Church of God hath proſpered, and the very blood of its members, hath, through Divine Providence, been the ſeed, of ſome of its ableſt human defenders.

Some writers have adduced, what we may at leaſt call a collateral proof, from the various, full, and expreſs acknowledgments, of ſeveral important things contained in the Bible, made by heathens, or by enemies. Thus the creation of the world, under much obſcurity and fable, is deſcribed by Ovid. The long lives of men in the firſt ages of the world, by Manetho the Egyptian, —Beroſus the Chaldean, and others. The flood is mentioned by Beroſus, whoſe words are recited by Joſephus. The Deucalion of Ovid, though it has been applied to a partial inundation, in a later period of ſociety, ſeems, however indiſtinctly, to point towards the ſame thing. Noah is mentioned under the idea of bifronted Janus by Beroſus, and Herodotus; becauſe he lived in both worlds. We read of the ark, and of the deſtruction of Sodom by Polyhiſtor. Pliny ſays, there was ſuch a man as Moſes, and a people called Iſraelites, over whom he was captain-general, and whom he led out of Egypt,

Egypt, as is teſtified by the moſt ancient records of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Grecians. Of the coming of the Iſraelites into Canaan, ſee the teſtimony of Procopius. Of Solomon we read in Dionyſius Caſſius: and Tacitus the prince of Roman hiſtorians, ſpeaks of the perſecution of the Chriſtians by Nero, with his uſual brevity and conciſeneſs. The ſtar, that appeared at the birth of our Saviour, is taken notice of by Pliny, and alſo by Calcidius, an heathen philoſopher. The ſlaughter of the infants by Herod is recorded by Macrobius, notwithſtanding the unjuſt boaſt, which Voltaire hath made to the contrary. In this caſe, as alas! we dread in many others, he muſt have deliberately ſhut his eyes againſt the fact. The teſtimony of Lentulus, in his Epiſtle to the Emperor Tiberius, is conſiderable, as recited by Eutropius in theſe words. "There hath appeared "in our days, and yet is living, a man of great "virtue or power, named Jeſus Chriſt, who is "called of the nations the Prophet of truth, whom "his diſciples call the Son of God, a raiſer of the "dead, and a healer of all manner of diſeaſes."

It were eaſy to enlarge here, but we conceive it unneceſſary to add more than the above; conſidering, that the books on theſe points are ſo many, and the arguments ſo numerous and eaſy, while we maintain they cannot be overthrown.

Our next point is to ſhew, that the Scriptures have a greater tendency, to bring men to repent-

ance, than apparitions, or extraordinary meſſengers poſſibly can, even admitting their reality. Previous to which, our doubts muſt be removed, nor would it be an eaſy taſk to effect this, provided we conſider, from what more than plauſible cauſes, they ariſe. We will not aſſume the dictatorial power of denying, that there ever have been apparitions. This might be more, than we could well prove. But we will venture to affirm, there have not been near ſo many as are reported. And the way wherein the majority of them hath been narrated, doth not, when viewed by the penetrating eye, much contribute to their gaining ground. For example, the well known inſtance told at the end of Drelincourt on Death, hath by many ſenſible men, been conſidered, as a diſgrace to the book.

Both the Jewiſh and Chriſtian diſpenſations, were confirmed by ſigns and wonders; nor ſtand in need of any farther claim, beyond what they inherently poſſeſs, to our moſt implicit credence. Grant one really came from the dead, to tell us what danger we are in, and what we ſhould do to be ſaved, ſtill the infallible ſpirit, ſpeaking in the ſacred page, is to be preferred. That way which God hath appointed for the manifeſtation of his own glory, and the converſion of ſinners, from the paths of vice to genuine happineſs, muſt in the very nature of the thing itſelf be ſuperior, to all other ways or means, in the promoting of that great

great end. Wherefore the Apoſtle juſtly concludes,—Many other ſigns, truly did Jeſus in the preſence of his diſciples, which are not written in this book. But theſe are written, that ye might believe, that Jeſus is the Chriſt, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name *. This idea muſt not be limited to New Teſtament times:—it ran through both diſpenſations:—hear Iſaiah, viii. 19, 20. And when they ſhall ſay unto you, ſeek unto them that have familiar ſpirits, and unto wizzards, that peep and mutter; ſhould not a people ſeek unto their God? To the law and to the teſtimony, if they ſpeak not according to this rule, it is becauſe there is no light in them. Let us ſubjoin to this, the glorious teſtimony which Paul gave the believing Theſſalonians; For this cauſe alſo thank we God without ceaſing, becauſe when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh alſo in you that believe †.

Our Redeemer confirmed the Patriarch's reference,—Had you believed Moſes, you would have believed me; but if you believe not his writings, how ſhall you believe my words? Did they believe, when Lazarus, the brother of Mary, roſe from the dead; nay they conſulted to put him to

* John xx. 30, 31. † 1 Epheſ. ii. 13.

death, and actually did crucify him, who raiſed him; and whom, though he raiſed himſelf from the dead, they rejected *. In a word, compliance with this requeſt, would have anſwered no one good purpoſe in the converſion of his brethren, of courſe was properly denied.

From this paſſage, amidſt many other uſeful inferences, which might be drawn from it; let us learn to prize the word of God above all earthly concerns; ſince it contains the things, that ſhall judge us at the laſt day. Let us ſearch them diligently, adding the fervent, and uniform prayers of faith, that they, through the operations of the Bleſſed Spirit, may be inſtrumental to our conviction and converſion. May the advice of Jehoſaphat ſink deep into every heart. Believe in the Lord your God, ſo ſhall you be eſtabliſhed; believe his Prophets, ſo ſhall you proſper. True religion being ſolid and ſubſtantial, aſſumes no overſtrained appearance of piety, for having it really; it fears not any ſuppoſitions, that may be made to its prejudice; while the falſe, which is only its ſhadow, and entirely deſtitute of its ſubſtance, like all other ſhadows, appears much larger than the body, of which they are only an overcharged figure, of a very confuſed reſemblance. It is the good diſpoſitions of the heart, which conſtitute the real merit of moral character. It is

* John v. 46, 47.

religion

religion drawn from the word of God, and not as founded in traditions, or the commandments of men, which inſpires the taſte of true glory, and inclines us to think nothing neceſſary, but our duty; nothing valuable, but integrity and equity; nothing comfortable, but the teſtimony of our own conſcience; nor any thing ſhameful, but what is vicious. Real piety makes a man truly diſintereſted, and ſecures his liberty. It raiſes him above flattery, reproach, menaces, and misfortunes: and habituates him in every thought, word, and action, to have a view to the final approbation of the Supreme Judge. To this the man of real goodneſs never prefers the faint glitter of a falſe glory; which will vaniſh like ſmoke, at the hour of death.

Learn alſo hence ye worldly wiſe, yet ſelf-deceivers, what ignorance:—what folly, what madneſs it is to delay your purpoſes of amendment, and your preparations for eternity? Can you diſprove the uncertainty of life, and the foreboding apprehenſions?—The ſecret dread of falling into that place, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched, which at times, like a frightful ſpectre, ſtarts in on your licentious mirth, unwarrantable purſuits, or guilty joys. And will you reſiſt the calls of tendereſt love?—the offers of mercy, to be murderers of your precious ſouls? Remember, who it is that hath ſaid,—"If you

" believe not that I am he, you ſhall die in your " ſins."

Be not diſcouraged beyond meaſure; ye, who are outwardly afflicted and poor, provided ye are ſeekers of the kingdom of Heaven, and his righteouſneſs, for there remains both glory, and heavenly reſt for you.

Ye rich and affluent, conſider yourſelves as the ſtewards of Providence. Take a pleaſure in largely communicating to the wants of others, being withal diligent in diſcriminating, according to your power, the meritorious, from the undeſerving. Let no object paſs your door, complaining of your barbarity;—if you cannot relieve, be courteous; and in the kindneſs of words, try to mitigate thoſe woes, you have not the ability to leſſen: for even by ſo doing, the bleſſing of thoſe, that were ready to periſh, ſhall come upon you: And may it reſt on you, and your's, for ever and for ever. Amen, and Amen.

EXPO-

EXPOSITION VIII.

From LUKE XIX. and firſt Ten Verſes.

And Jeſus entered, and paſſed through Jericho: and behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he ſought to ſee Jeſus who he was; and could not for the preſs, becauſe he was little of ſtature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a ſycamore tree, to ſee him: for he was to paſs that way. And when Jeſus came to the place, he looked up, and ſaw him, and ſaid unto him, Zaccheus, make haſte, and come down: for to-day I muſt abide at thy houſe. And he made haſte, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they ſaw it, they all murmured, ſaying, That he was gone to be gueſt with a man that is a ſinner. And Zaccheus ſtood, and ſaid unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken any thing from any man by falſe accuſation, I reſtore him four-fold. And Jeſus ſaid unto him, This day is ſalvation come to this houſe, for ſo much as he alſo is a ſon of Abraham. For the ſon of man is come, to ſeek, and to ſave, that which was loſt.

THIS tranſaction, took place in the third year of the public miniſtry of Chriſt, computing, from the third paſſover after his baptiſm.

Jericho was a city not far diſtant from Jeruſalem, of conſiderable note in early periods of the Jewiſh hiſtory, and memorable for the miraculous circumſtances of its overthrow by Joſhua, together with the ſingular denunciation, made by that valiant champion, againſt whomſoever ſhould rebuild it. Curſed, ſaid he, be the man before the Lord, that raiſeth up, and buildeth this city Jericho: he ſhall lay the foundation thereof in his firſt-born; and in his youngeſt ſon, ſhall he ſet up the gates of it: which thoſe, acquainted with Scripture Hiſtory, muſt know, was literally fulfilled. Whether this direful imprecation was obliterated from the records, or traditions of the Iſraelites, we ſhall not poſitively ſay; but certain it is, that it was rebuilt in the days of Ahab by Hiel the Bethelite: and is now, with the reſt of the holy land, under the Turkiſh empire.

Chriſt at this time, was going from the other ſide Jordan to Bethany, a village town near Jeruſalem, peculiarly diſtinguiſhed by being the reſidence of Mary and Martha; whoſe brother Lazarus the Saviour raiſed from the dead; and alſo for being the ſpot, whence, after having bleſſed the diſciples, he aſcended up on high, and led captivity captive. He was now on his way to do the former of theſe, but as he continually delighted in the conferring of benefits, he performed many miracles by the way. In the deſtruction of Jericho, Joſhua ſaved none ſave Rahab, for her

kindneſs

kindneſs in concealing the ſpies, and thoſe, who, are fond of ſtretching analogies, in ſcriptural matters as far as they will go, remark; that in paſſing through, Jeſus converts only Zaccheus, the publican. Joſhua, it is ſaid, ſowed ſalt on the ſoil, to render it barren, yet in this devoted city, our Redeemer hath a ſpiritual harveſt. Samaria was a wicked city, full of idolatry, and the mart of all abominations, yet it was inhabited by many, who were among the firſt believers in the Meſſiah: and out of Galilee, deſpiſed even to a proverb, the Lord Jeſus called ſeveral of his Apoſtles. In Jericho, there lives a rich man that is to be ſaved; denoting, that though it too often happens, that the powerful and the opulent, pay not all the requiſite attention to religion, in all its parts, yet there is nothing in human authority, or wealth, abſtractedly conſidered; which by any means impedes their preſent peace, or future felicity. On the contrary, theſe might be much enhanced by a proper application, of what Providence hath laid to their hands. Every gift of Heaven's bounty, muſt intrinſically be good: it is ſolely the perverſion of it, that turns it to the greater miſery of the poſſeſſor.

Verſe 2d. *And behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.*

The intereſting ſtory, is by the Divine Spirit uſhered in upon our attention, with a note of admiration;

miration; Behold,—which, as it were, more loudly calls upon thoſe, who are opulent to no valuable purpoſe; or who are clothed with that wealth, which may ſoon take to itſelf wings; to turn their view to real riches indeed, and the propereſt uſe of preſent affluence: even by deeds of charity and mercy, to cover the multitude of ſins.

Some writers contend, that he was a Gentile, while others equally ſtrenuous aſſert, he was a Jew. Which ever he was, is a matter very immaterial. That he might have been of Abraham's lineage, is clear from various circumſtances. Zaccai was a name in uſe among the Jews; witneſs Ezra ii. 9. In Hebrew writers the name of Rabbi Zaccai, or Zaccheus, is often found; and we are told, there flouriſhed in the days of our Saviour a famous doctor of the name, who lived, till after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. The argument of his being a Gentile, drawn from his employment, does not hold, ſince there were Jews who were publicans; for inſtance, Levi and Matthew. Why under the polity then exiſting, might there not be Iſraelitiſh, as well as Gentile publicans?

Zaccheus was the Receiver-general, though of what peculiar taxes or impoſts, is not eaſy to conjecture, nor is it of moment to know. Suffice it to ſay, he was a perſon of figure among the publicans; and of riches got by his employment. Nor need we be ſurprized at this, for as ſoon as luxury, becomes rather one of the leading characteriſtics

teriſtics of a people: thoſe in public offices, for the moſt part, have handſome ſalaries; and ſometimes ſtill greater perquiſites annexed to, or ariſing from the nature of them. Men of abilities, or good and virtuous characters ſo inveſted; can never be too much encouraged. We wiſh them enjoyment in all they poſſeſs. Nevertheleſs, under the beſt regulations, and the wiſeſt code of laws, it unavoidably happens, that a variety of incidents, naturally preſent themſelves, which a mean, ſordid, and unprincipled individual, may eaſily, and with impunity; yet moſt oppreſſively, and fraudulently, convert to the baſeſt of purpoſes, or his own private emolument.

No wonder, the very trade was hateful to the Jews. In the firſt place, it put them in mind of their ſubjection to the Romans, and reduced many to extreme penury, from the rapine and oppreſſion, exerciſed by thoſe in that time: which idea of beggary was directly contrary to the Moſaic law; as may be ſeen from the whole tenor of the 15th chapter of Deuteronomy. At this period in every province of Judea, there were many collectors, whoſe avarice, ſteeled by their warrants, or deputations from the Roman Emperor, multiplied the number of the wretched and needy: for where there are many caterpillars, the fruit is ſoon conſumed; and where there are many extortioners, beggary muſt unavoidably follow. Like many modern plunderers, their diſtance from the ſeat of

govern-

government, might inflame their rapacity. Ah! what avails the wealth, which power, injuſtice, and fraud, ſeizes from the weak and defenceleſs:—if got under the imprecations of the widow and orphan? Should a reflecting moment come;—without the deepeſt repentance, and ampleſt reſtitution, where can they lead, but to ſuicide, or hell? In the eſtimation of good men, ſuch characters are deſpiſed; and nothing but the depravity of human nature, reſcues them from univerſal diſgrace. But the rich have many friends, who will take their part, be their conduct ever ſo flagitious. Let them talk ever ſo arrogantly, there are who will defend them, merely for their wealth; while inwardly, they deſpiſe them: and others may be found baſe enough, to proſtitute their abilities, to ſcreen the crimes they know, in order to participate of the wealth acquired by them. Every day's converſation in the world, confirms the remark of Sirach's ſon:—When a rich man ſpeaketh, every man holdeth his tongue, and look what he ſaith, they extol it to the clouds: but if the poor man ſpeak, they ſay,—What fellow is this? And if he ſtumble, they will help to overthrow him. Riches are good unto him, that hath no ſin, and poverty is evil in the mouth of the ungodly *.

The inferior officers among thoſe collectors of the revenue in Judea, and other provinces re-

* Eccleſ. xiii. 23, 24.

motely

motely ſituated from Rome, were generally people of unbounded avarice, — factious ſpirits, — broken fortunes,—or from the dregs of the community.

Verſe 3d. *And he ſought to ſee Jeſus, who he was; and could not for the preſs, becauſe he was little of ſtature.*

We naturally wiſh to ſee thoſe, whoſe fame is in every one's mouth. The very being able to ſay we have ſeen illuſtrious characters, gives ſome degree of conſequence, at leaſt among thoſe who have not enjoyed the ſight. Curioſity is a powerful, and uſeful principle in the human breaſt; in proportion as it ariſes, from laudable, or unjuſt motives. Zaccheus at firſt meant no more than to ſee the ſtature,—the complexion of Jeſus:— to make remarks on his look,—his walk,—his dreſs,—his age,—and retinue, with other things of a ſimilar nature. To hear him ſpeak; from the croud and other circumſtances, was an honour he dreamed not of: conſequently his deſire to ſee Jeſus, as yet was not of the ſame kind, with theirs mentioned in Matth. xiii. 17. For verily I ſay unto you, that many prophets, and righteous men, have deſired to ſee the things which ye ſee, and have not ſeen them: and to hear thoſe things, which ye hear, and have not heard them. It more reſembled that of Herod recorded by Luke, xxiii. 8. And when Herod ſaw Jeſus, he was exceeding glad, for he was deſirous to ſee him of a long ſeaſon,

ſon, becauſe he had heard many things of him, and he hoped to have ſeen ſome miracle done by him.

How much would it exalt the character, and tend to the felicity of the rich in this world, were they as deſirous to underſtand the Goſpel; as Zaccheus was to ſee its author, in the fleſh? We may ſtill, bleſſed be God, with a believing mind, ſee him as Stephen did; ſitting on the right hand of God, interceding for us, and at death ready to receive our ſpirits.

Zaccheus hath a double impediment to encounter. Firſt the multitudes, who from the ſame motive were accompanying Jeſus, or haſtening to meet him. Wherever an inclination to virtue, darts acroſs the boſoms of thoſe, but entering on its practice; there is generally ſomething to baulk the ſame, following in ſucceſſion. Too many examples, run counter to Integrity, who ſeeks the ſhade, more friendly to her ſacred intereſts: while Vice ſtalks abroad, exulting in the praiſe of fools, and eager to be ſeen. The kingdom of the Redeemer was not of this world, nor came by obſervation, wherefore he was not carried in pompous proceſſions, nor rode in an open chariot, like the princes of the earth: though the chariots of God, even thouſands of Angels are his; and he is the Lord among them. On this occaſion, the Saviour was as one of us. It was in the days of his humiliation, when he was deſpiſed and rejected of thoſe,

whom

whom he came to ſanctify and ſave. Amidſt all their pretended admiration of him; he was ſuffered to walk, and perhaps bore inconveniences to his body, from the preſſure of the croud: who probably, kept back thoſe, that would more ſincerely have attended to him: witneſs their rebuking honeſt Bartimeus in the preceding chapter, for his earneſt ſupplications in behalf of his ſight, till the compaſſionate Jeſus called him, and granted him his requeſt. We doubt not, but he was following Jeſus, though kept from being ſo near him, as he could have wiſhed, by thoſe of colder hearts towards him. The croud hindered thoſe, who brought the man ſick of the palſy, till they uncovered the roof of the houſe where he was; and let down the bed, wherein the ſick man lay. The croud prevented the man deaf and dumb; till Chriſt took him aſide out of the multitude, and cured him.

The ſecond impediment aroſe from himſelf. He was overtopt by moſt about him. Finding his fancy baulked, ſharpened his ingenuity, and induced him to obtain by induſtry, what nature had denied him. Who in this caſe would not rather be a Zaccheus than a Saul, though he was higher by head and ſhoulders, than all about him, and honoured with an earthly crown? The being little in our own eſtimation, is not the fartheſt removed from attaining the fullneſs of the ſtature, of perfect men in Chriſt Jeſus. There was a noble ſoul in

this publican's little body; according to the trite, yet generally true remark, that wherever nature hath rather curtailed her uſual favours, to the external form or appearance; ſhe recompenſes it by greater goodneſs of heart, or intellectual capacities. The common people in the days of our Lord's incarnation were ſo deſirous to ſee him, hear him, or be near him, that neither lameneſs, nor blindneſs, nor even ſickneſs, could keep them away from him; whereas in our time it is faſhionable to deviſe excuſes, for neither liſtening to his voice in Providence, or the ſpecial ordinances of his appointment: and many pretend, that conſiſtent with reaſon, and a liberal education, they cannot aſſent to the terms of ſalvation, as they are ſtated, or ſaid to be ſtated in the Goſpel. Among thoſe who wiſh to ſee the Saviour, many reſemble Nicodemus, who came by night, for fear of the world, and its dreaded, though in reality, ignoble laugh: while in broad day, nay, perhaps in oppoſition to the dictates of juſtice and humanity; they run, as Gehazi, after Naaman the Syrian, for profit or pleaſure. Every man meets with two particular hindrances, ere he finally reſts on a Redeemer's merit, viz. the enticements of the world, like the multitude without, and what reſults from the depravity of our nature from within. Owing to theſe in conjunction, we ſee him not, till by faith we run, and climb the tree of Goſpel grace.

Verſe

Verſe 4th. *And he ran before, and climbed up into a ſycamore-tree to ſee him, for he was to paſs that way.*

Whoſoever embraces the truth in the love of it, muſt lay their account with ſuffering, and muſt perform their duty, however contrary to the faſhions around them, or the examples, which preſs moſt upon their notice. If the Almighty Saviour, condeſcended to become a man of no reputation for our ſakes; ſhall we think it hard, to bear the ſcoffing of the ignorant, and the malignity of the worthleſs, for him, that gave his life a ranſom for ours? How many make ſhipwreck of faith, and of a good conſcience, not ſo much from innate corruption of heart, as an unwarranted weakneſs, which diſqualifies them from encountering boldly, the reproaches, to which a life of genuine piety might ſubject them? They prefer the ſcanty gleanings of this earth, to the poſſeſſion of heavenly manſions, and rather hazard the hope of eternal glory, than riſque the approbation of man, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils, and whoſe power is ſo limited. The ambitious, or thoſe who ſtand high in the liſts of fame, will unconcernedly hear all the direful conſequences, awaiting thoſe who are dead in treſpaſſes and ſins: but tremble at the moſt diſtant idea, of loſing a grain of the applauſe, they have obtained. The covetous hear, with indifference, about treaſures beyond the grave; while every fluctuation in the

ſtocks alarms them, and Judas like, they apprehend, that only to be loſt, which in this world comes not to their bag. And all the pictures you can draw of heavenly pleaſures, rouzes not the ſoul, that is immoderately attached to corporeal ones. The judgment often affixes exaggerated, if not altogether groundleſs merit, to that wherein the affections center: in the purſuit of which phantom, numbers beſtow more pains, than through divine grace, would ſecure an entrance, into the regions of permanent delight.

Zaccheus is of another mind, than the phantaſtic crew, and makes a wiſer choice; for notwithſtanding the low jeſt and ridicule, which many would think themſelves juſtified, in caſting on a man of his rank, running before a mob; inſtead of being intimidated, off he ſets, and like thoſe eager to win a race, flies with ſpeed before Jeſus, and the company who followed him, to the largeſt, and moſt convenient ſycamore-tree he could find. The Syriac verſion calleth it a wild fig, which grew plentifully in thoſe champaign countries. Verbal critics, who live but in a ſquabble, or like eels, wind the eaſieſt in the deepeſt mud, and delight in whatever admits of wrangling, whether uſeful or not, matters nothing; have run into a ſtrange diverſity of opinions about this tree. In our opinion, ſpending time on ſuch an enquiry, is abſolutely waſting it. The difference in the original term, hath led many to conclude; it could not be of the

ſame

ſame kind, with that mentioned, Luke xvii. 6. of which our Lord ſaid;—If ye had faith as a grain of muſtard ſeed, ye might ſay unto this ſycamore tree, be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the ſea, and it ſhould obey you. This, it is apprehended, was a ſpecies of the mulberry-tree.

Doubtleſs, Zaccheus made choice of a tall one, that he might have a full view:—a ſtrong one, that it might bear him:—and one the neareſt to the road, the Saviour walked. So exceedingly judicious was his choice in this reſpect, that it ſeems he fixed on one, under the ſpreading branches of which he was directly to paſs. The queen of the ſouth was not more zealous, in undertaking a long and tedious journey to hear the wiſdom of Solomon, than Zaccheus ardently graſped the waving branches, and twined himſelf round this tree, we own to ſee a nobler ſight, and to hear ſpeak, though he dreamt not of the exalted privilege then, a wiſer than Solomon.

Behold he climbs!—Bluſh ye, who never took a ſingle painful ſtep, to obtain the fruit of that tree of life, which heals the maladies of the mind! —Did we ſtand rightly affected on this point, neither honours, nor preferment, nor profit, nor pleaſure, nor kindred, nor friends, could withhold us from earneſtly looking at him, to lodge whom in our hearts, is to have all things our's,

whether things preſent, or things to come, ſince in that caſe, we are Chriſt's, and Chriſt is God's.

What a variable thing is zeal! The people in David's time brought ſo much treaſure, and ſo many gifts to the building of the temple, that the prieſts were obliged to bid them ceaſe; whereas, many under a nobler diſpenſation grudge the little, which they give for the ſupport of public teachers, nay, they will allow, thoſe abilities they admire, to ſtarve.

An old writer has a happy enough conceit here, remarking, that the tree which Zaccheus climbed, was not like that unfruitful one our Saviour curſed: ſeeing it bore precious fruit, ſuch as Chriſt himſelf vouchſafed to pluck. The tree grew in the way he was to paſs; otherwiſe, Zaccheus had climbed to no purpoſe. So if we would truly come to the Lord Jeſus, we muſt feed our flocks, beſide the ſhepherd's tents. We muſt ſeek in the way, where he hath promiſed to manifeſt himſelf, and under thoſe means to which he ordinarily annexeth a bleſſing. We may hunt after happineſs in ten thouſand roads, yet miſs of it. If error miſleads our underſtanding, in a ſearch ſo important, what avails our ſolicitude and diligence? On ſuch a ſuppoſition wiſdom addreſſes us, Wherefore do ye ſpend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which ſatisfieth not: hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye, that which is good, and let your ſoul delight itſelf in fatneſs. Incline your ear, come unto me, hear, and your ſouls

ſhall

ſhall live, and I will make an everlaſting covenant with you, even the ſure mercies of David. *

Verſe 5th. *And when Jeſus came to the place he looked up, and ſaw him, and ſaid unto him, Zaccheus, make haſte, and come down: for to-day I muſt abide at thy houſe.*

Little did he dream, when he climbed the tree, of being noticed by the wondrous paſſenger; whereas he that would have been ſatisfied with a view, is admitted to intimacy. Although the love of money, rather predominated in the breaſt of Zaccheus, a ſtronger than all the powers of the prince of the air, reſcueth his ſpoil. No man, we are told, durſt approach the Perſian monarch, except he ſtretched out his golden ſceptre; nor can any ſtand acceptably in the ſight of God, till called by the power of his word and ſpirit, enabling them to bend to the ſceptre of his grace. It had been impracticable for Zaccheus to get over him, by all the efforts he could make: the Redeemer, like a good ſhepherd, following the ſtraggling lamb, comes to the place where he was. He knows the propereſt means for reclaiming his people, with the preciſe time, when theſe ſhall operate. Every one whom the Father hath given unto him, is in all places, and at all times, in his more immediate view: ſeeing he continually rejoices in the habitable part of his earth, and his

* Iſaiah lv. 2, 3.

delight from everlaſting, hath been with the ſons of men.

He knew Zaccheus was in the ſycamore-tree, as he ſaw Nathaniel under the fig-tree, ere Philip called him. He came to Galilee, and walked where he knew he ſhould meet with Peter, and Andrew, and James and John:—to the place of receipt of cuſtom, where Matthew was:—and to Jacob's well, that he might call the woman of Samaria. On the preſent occaſion, before Zaccheus could get a glance of Chriſt, he in beams of mercy and regard, looks full at Zaccheus. What a diſtinguiſhing tenderneſs was there! compared with the way, in which he beheld the preſſing croud. O my ſoul, may that look be thine!—We learn that Job's three friends, by reaſon of his changed ſituation and great diſtreſs, did not know him: but the Glorious Perſonage, whoſe characteriſtic it is, to ſtick cloſer than a brother, knoweth all them that are his, and calleth them by name.

"And ſaid unto him Zaccheus." Oh how muſt this ſound have pierced his heart! Probably at the moment, he was wreathing his body among the branches, to get the ſight he wiſhed. When Lo! he is called by name, as was Cyrus long before he was born, and Saul on the road to Damaſcus. How doth he know me? What an honour is this? How rapid muſt have been the tranſition of ſentiments in his agitated mind!—All

was

was in exact conformity, to the Saviour's uſual way, of granting more than is deſired, and he, that is always found of them that ſeek him, is alſo ſometimes found of them, that know him not. The ſick of the palſy that aſked health, likewiſe obtained forgiveneſs of ſins. Solomon deſired wiſdom, and the Lord gave him wiſdom, and abundance of wealth. Jacob aſked but meat and cloathing, and the Almighty made him both great and opulent, and reverenced wherever he came. Zaccheus wiſhed to ſee Chriſt; when O pleaſing addition! he is to to have the exalted honour of entertaining him.

"Make haſte, come down." He that called Adam, when ſkulking among the trees of the garden, to hear the ſentence due to his diſobedience; now calls Zaccheus from the tree to reap the promiſed ſalvation. In our religious frames or attempts, we are very unequal: either too high or too low; too hot or too cold; too haſty or too ſlothful; ſometimes we run well, and who hindreth us; at others we are called upon, yet turn a deaf ear. To delay, in matters reſpecting eternity, is moſt dangerous. No more, let us put off from day to day, leſt the wrath of the Lord break forth ſuddenly, and we be deſtroyed in our ſecurity. When we are called by the ſtill, ſmall voice of the Goſpel, to come from all other dependencies, to truſt in the Son of God, we muſt directly comply, be our ſtate or character what it may, crying with the Pſalmiſt: Enlarge my heart

O God, then ſhall I run the way of thy commandments with delight. The ſtate of a ſinner reſembles that of Lot in Sodom, when it was juſt going to be deſtroyed :—and like that of the manſlayer, when purſued by the avenger of blood,—his hope of ſurety, in a great meaſure, depended on celerity.

" For to day I muſt abide at thy houſe." There is no ſenſe, wherein we can conceive the Saviour aſking any thing of us, ſave what implies his intention, of conferring ſome invaluable bleſſing on us. When Chriſt aſketh the woman of Samaria for water; it is that he may give her faith in the Meſſiah,—When he aſks his diſciples, Have ye any meat? it is, that he may quicken their reliſh for the bread of life. Amazing humility, that the Son of God, the Lord of worlds, would enter a ſinner's houſe! but Oh!—the depth of that condeſcenſion, which induced him to aſk refreſhment at a creature's hand!—In contemplation of the Redeemer's poverty while on earth, pathetically indeed, did the Prophet exclaim, O the hope of Iſrael, the Saviour thereof, in time of trouble, why ſhouldſt thou be as a ſtranger in the land, and as a way-faring man, that turneth aſide, to tarry for a night? * What a dreadful riſque, ye ſons of vanity, and diſſipation, do you run? The Saviour by his word,—by his Spirit,—by his Providence,—by your conſciences,—by his faithful ſer-

* Jer. xiv. 8.

vants,

vants,—and by your own immortal intereſts calleth you: And how ſhall you eſcape, if you neglect ſo great ſalvation? To day, however unkind in times paſt you may have been, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. With alacrity and diſpatch, diſmiſs your prejudices, forſake your ſins, and ſet open every avenue to your hearts, that the King of Glory may enter in. If with the ſpouſe in the Canticles, you delay:—the beloved may have withdrawn himſelf, and there is a call, that moſt aſſuredly will be repeated no more. Seize the preſent moment, and ere it carries its report to the book of God's remembrance, imprint the mark of wiſdom on its wings.

Verſe 6th. *And he made haſte, and came down, and received him joyfully.*

Moral guilt is the only cauſe of condemnation. To thoſe under revelation, it is proclaimed: Whoſoever, will let him come, and take of the waters of life freely. Ere Zaccheus thought of it, he was called: ſo none can come to Chriſt, except the Father draw him. Thouſands ſit under the means of grace, to whom they are never ſanctified; nay, they may at times be much alarmed, yet never ſincerely embrace the Goſpel. Even among thoſe finally ſaved, many calls may have ſounded in their ears, before they effectually reached their hearts.

The Lord called holy Samuel three times, previous to his anſwering, becauſe at that time, he knew

knew not the Lord; whom, when he really knew to be the Glorious Speaker, he earneſtly intreats; Speak Lord, for thy ſervant heareth. So prevalent is the Goſpel call, accompanied with the divine bleſſing; that of a bloody perſecutor, it maketh a heavenly preacher, and a bold defender of the faith he once ſo deteſted:—of illiterate fiſhermen, it makes inſpired Apoſtles, and admirable orators:—and here of a rapacious publican, it makes an humble Chriſtian, and a generous benefactor to the poor. The ſenſes and faculties of the ſoul yield ſubmiſſion; whenever it thus entereth: the ear liſteneth, the tongue confeſſeth, the heart believeth, the head deviſeth,—the hand performeth, the foot runneth, the eye directs, the judgment weighs,—the will chuſes,—the memory retains, and all concur to do thy will, O God. Hereby, we are brought from the ſevereſt bondage, to the ſweeteſt liberty. The Almighty ſaid: Let there be light, and there was light: Chriſt ſays,—"Come down Zaccheus," and he quickly comes. So thoroughly did the call affect him, that convinced of ſin, and converted to the Saviour, he rejoiced in being counted worthy to entertain ſuch a gueſt. The unexpected generoſity, with which this favour was granted, enhanced its value in the ſight of the publican. We ought all of us, to be equally quick and diligent in the work of the Lord, for as he loveth a chearful giver, ſo he doth a ready follower.

When Abraham thought only of entertaining ſtrangers, he had Angels under his roof, and when Zaccheus merely wiſhed to ſee a wondrous man, he comes down, to receive firſt into his houſe, and next into his heart, the Son of God. What ſtrong perſuaſives, to greater hoſpitality, than in general reigns, doth this include? The compaſſionate Jeſus often aſks our aid, in the imploring attitude, and voice of a lame,—a blind, or poor old man. Under theſe, together with many other characters, he comes hungry, thirſty, naked; without friends, houſe, or money; and truly bleſſed are they, who from a principle of love to him, take a pleaſure in feeding, cloathing, and harbouring thoſe, whom they believe to be his friends. The narrow damp rooms of priſons,—the lonely cottage,—the widowed houſe,—and the bleak retirements of modeſt merit, contain many of his diſciples, and more laſting honours, than the fineſt ſculptured marble can convey, will reſt upon them, whoſe lives and fortunes are ſpent in wiping away the tear of diſtreſs, and who like the good Samaritan, pour in the oil of gladneſs, with the gentleſt humanity. This idea ſo enraptured the Apoſtle James, that he exclaims: Pure Religion and undefiled before God is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widow in their affliction, thereby ſubſtituting, an eſſential part for the whole. What a ſhame to thoſe profeſſing Chriſtianity, that any ſhould ſtarve in garrets,—or die in priſons or ſtreets,

ſtreets, for want of the neceſſaries of life? Methinks, ideas of the divine diſpleaſure ſhould haunt their ſlumbers, who ſleep in elegant chambers on beds of down; while the grey haired old man, or the enfeebled matron, who hath ſeen better days, ſleep under the hedges, which form their incloſures. Not more certainly, did Abel's blood crying for vengeance, reach the heavenly throne, than their cries will in one ſhape or other, bring down judgments on thoſe, either in this world or the next, whoſe boſoms are ſteeled againſt the claims of the indigent. What a picture of philanthropy, and how engaging the example of holy Job, who in the days of his proſperity ſuffered not the ſtranger to lie in the ſtreets, but opened his door to the traveller? If, ſays he, proteſting his innocence, I have withheld the poor from their deſire, or have cauſed the eyes of the widow to fail: Or have eaten my morſel myſelf alone, and the fatherleſs hath not eaten thereof. If I have ſeen any periſh for want of cloathing, or any poor without covering: If his loins have not bleſſed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my ſheep: If I rejoiced at the deſtruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myſelf, when an evil found him,—Then let affliction overtake me.

Verſe 7th. *And when they ſaw it, they all murmured, ſaying, That he was gone to be gueſt, with a man that is a ſinner.*

Small circumſtances, ſometimes, develope characters. The major part of thoſe preſent being adverſaries, this article ſhews their tempers. They neither entertained him themſelves, nor were willing others ſhould. Not one of them had aſked him to reſt, or refreſh himſelf: and they ſeem vexed; Zaccheus did it, even when the Redeemer, if I may uſe the expreſſion, invited himſelf. Their hearts being full of malice, was evident in the envy, they bore to the few who believed in him. The grand aim of theſe murmurs, was to infuſe into the people, the notion that he could not be the Meſſiah; who frequented the houſes of ſinners. When the vicious cannot charge the virtuous, with any juſt reproach; they fret and grudge at their well doing. Thoſe of this caſt in the preſent caſe, could not accuſe Chriſt of ſin; therefore they rail at him, for keeping company with ſinners.

The high prieſts, from their eminent ſtations, looked down with contempt on the humble Jeſus. The Scribes and Phariſees in their own eſtimation, were too good, too wiſe, too holy to admit him at their tables, or into their ſociety; nor ſatisfied with this, they arraign his being converſant, with thoſe whom they diſdained. Jericho being one of the ſtationary reſidences of the prieſts and Levites, they probably murmured loudeſt. The moſt exceptionable characters, are always the moſt implacable and cenſorious. The beſt heart is the apteſt

to ſuſpect itſelf; whereas thoſe that make Religion a cloak for their vices, judge others harſhly, while they deem themſelves altogether righteous. If not in words, by ſupercilious looks, and affected grimace, they ſay to thoſe around, who are of chearful tempers and more ſocial diſpoſitions, ſtand by, for if I am not, I inſiſt on being thought holier than you.

Thoſe prieſts and Levites among the Jews, might have a great character for wiſdom and ſanctity; nor are their ſucceſſors few, who have a form of godlineſs, without the life and power. To guard againſt this dreadful illuſion, our Saviour tells his diſciples, Except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe, enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Theſe dogmatical characters found fault with Jeſus, becauſe he went to eat with a ſinful man. Were they without ſin? But Zaccheus was the chief of oppreſſors, who had amaſſed great riches: wherefore they judged it incompatible, with the character of a venerable prophet, or teacher of morals, to eat at ſuch a man's table, and enter into familiar converſation with him. Such conduct of theirs ſtands reprehenſible in many reſpects.

Firſt, their cenſure was general, granting moſt publicans were bad, ſome might be honeſt men.

* Matth. v. 20.

We

We have no right to ſlander countries, profeſſions, or diſtinct ranks in ſociety, ſimply becauſe they are ſuch. Again they much wronged Zaccheus, in judging him by what he had been, rather than what he now was. Whatever they knew of his paſt life, Chriſt ſaw the penitential frame of his ſoul at the moment, and rewards it proportionably. Admit him to be as bad as they thought him, where ſhould the phyſician go but to the ſick? Let them ſay what they would, they could not divert the attention of Zaccheus from his gueſt, or mar his future bliſs. In like manner, remember ye followers of the bleſſed Jeſus, that only tranſient things are within the power of your enemies, who ſhould they injure your property, or rob you of that precious jewel reputation, cannot hurt the nobler intereſts of your immortal ſouls. Wherefore fear not them that can kill the body,—truſt not in man,—ſeek not the favour of the world,—but ſeek to gain the approbation of him, whoſe province it is to pronounce the ſentence, Come ye bleſſed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.

Verſe 8th. *And Zaccheus ſtood, and ſaid unto the Lord: Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken any thing from any man, by falſe accuſation, I reſtore him four-fold.*

What were the private ſentiments of Zaccheus, concerning Chriſt, when he climbed the tree, we know not: but now he acknowledges him to be the Meſſiah, by directing his ſpeech to him as the judge

judge of ſincerity. Many things not recorded doubtleſs took place, both on the part of the Saviour, and on that of Zaccheus in this converſation. We find him, before whom others were wont to bend, now ſtands from reverence of his glorious Gueſt, and made his confeſſion, in which there are two parts, of which in order, let us ſpeak.

Firſt mark his liberality to the poor. Zaccheus had been an oppreſſor of them, now through Divine grace he is become their benefactor. Before, he had incroached on the property of others; now he ſcatters abroad his own. He had uſurped,—now he reſtores. Having found the pearl of great price, he is content not to ſell, but to give what he hath for it. When the rich ruler in the preceding chapter, was deſired to ſell all he had, and to give it to the poor, he went away ſorrowing, becauſe he had large poſſeſſions: whereas Zaccheus, perhaps as rich as he, of his own accord, beſtows half his goods upon the poor: herein fully anſwering St. James's demand, viz. ſhewing his faith by his works. Works of iniquity are not more the fruits of infidelity, than acts of mercy, ſpring from holy faith.

How different this from their conduct? who after the practice of fraud and injuſtice for years, deem it a ſufficient atonement to give away a little; and for eſtates ſo got, to bequeath a few pounds: and that ſometimes not till they ſee, it

cannot

cannot be much longer in their poſſeſſion. They evade granting immediate relief to the diſtreſſed, on the ſtale pretence, of not knowing what they may yet need themſelves: and therefore part with nothing; till death draws the ſable line of eternal ſeparation. The preacher bids us caſt our bread upon the waters; that is, to thoſe, whoſe watry eyes bewray their neceſſity, as an old writer fanciſully expreſſes it, or in greater conſonance we truſt to the wiſe man's ſentiment, to venture ſome of our goods upon our needy brethren, as merchants do theirs on the ſeas, with a view of a larger increaſe. When the widow relieved the Prophet, her oil failed not.

Zaccheus was liberal of his own, and that inſtantaneouſly. A fifth part was then ſuppoſed adequate to all charitable uſes. To give a tenth part in ordinary practice, was reckoned a medium. This penitent overleaps all theſe preſcribed forms, and generouſly gives a half.

The ſecond part of this honeſt declaration is, Reſtitution: to which many willing to confeſs their ſins, nevertheleſs feel a great backwardneſs; and yet where it can be done, and is not done, all our profeſſions avail nothing. "If I have taken any "thing from any man by falſe accuſation:" that is, If I have wittingly over-reached him in any tranſaction, or been guilty of the leaſt injury to his property, I reſtore him, and that directly; not deferring it, till my dying hour, or till thoſe I

have wronged are gone, I inſtantly ſhall fulfil what conſcience dictates to be done,—and return four-fold,—the ſame as was done in caſe of theft, eſpecially ſheep-ſtealing *. By this means, added to the principal, he amply compenſates the damages they had ſuſtained.

Perhaps, among the wealthy in all countries there are many, who, if they were to give one half to the poor, it is to be feared, they would not have enough left, to reſtore four-fold to thoſe they had wronged. Beſides actual rapine, or ſecretly plundering others, there is a ſpecies of oppreſſion too generally practiſed, nor though there are laws againſt it, inflicting penalties, are theſe ſo rigidly executed, as they certainly ought to be: we mean Uſury, which is abominable in the ſight of God, and contemptible in the eyes of all good men: and certainly calls for the fulleſt reſtitution, and the deepeſt repentance. We know there is a legal intereſt, which the preſent ſituation of men, and the well being of human ſociety, render equally proper for the one to pay, and the other to receive. This is one of the very ſinews of induſtry. But what we here conceive by Uſury, is that curſed love of money, which leads thoſe who have it, to watch the moment of poignant diſtreſs, and the critical neceſſities of their fellow-creatures, and affords them a miſerable relief under the moſt

* Exod. xxii. 1.

cruel

cruel and unjuſt conditions; which for the moſt part, only delays a little longer that wretchedneſs, whence they are never able afterwards to extricate themſelves. What an inſult to Chriſtianity, and good ſenſe, is it, to ſee thoſe making high pretenſions to character, offering at one time leſs for another's property, than they know it to be worth, or than they themſelves would once have given for it, merely, becauſe they are aware, the ſeller wants money, and muſt part with it at any rate.

Happy indeed is the man, who when on his death bed, can with a good conſcience, tell his children: "The little worldly goods I leave you, "have been honeſtly gotten, by unremitting aſ-"ſiduity, ſtrict œconomy, and painful induſtry. "Your uſing the ſame means, with a firm reliance "on the Father of all, will enable you to procure "a competency, for the real wants of you and "your's; and aware of the manifold ſnares to "which riches lead; I never had any anxious "wiſhes, that you ſhould poſſeſs them. My ſole "ambition was to help you to be wiſe, as far as "lay within the compaſs of my abilities; and my "earneſt prayer, both in your own hearing, and "in private, was, that you might be truly good. "What I undertook for you at your baptiſm, I "have uniformly endeavoured to perform: by "training you up,—in a deteſtation of vice, under "every diſguiſe;—in the love of God, to whom

" you are under the ſtrongeſt obligations, to live
" in the practice of all virtue.

" This life is but the dawn of your exiſtence,
" and I have with the moſt heart-felt ſolicitude,
" taught you the method, whereby you, through
" divine grace, may render it comfortable through
" all eternity. Let no maxims of the world at
" large, however popular or eſtabliſhed they may
" be:—no motives of ſelf-intereſt, however ſe-
" cret:—or intemperate ſallies of paſſion, however
" alluring, induce you, to relax your principles of
" integrity, and religion. Perdition frequently
" begins, in the ſlighteſt deviations from the paths
" of honour and rectitude.

" Alas! it is but too true; you ſaw in my conduct,
" many errors and foul blemiſhes, for which I
" have ſpent many a penſive hour, and am in-
" clined to hope, the Lord hath mercifully par-
" doned, through my repentance and faith in his
" Son. After all, my heart was ſtill on the ſide of
" virtue; and did you know the joy, with which
" that conſideration fills me at this awful hour,
" all the wealth which ocean's bed conceals, could
" not ſhake your attachment to truth and goodneſs.
" In all your ways, acknowledge God,—commit
" yourſelves to his diſpoſal;—be reſigned to his
" will; and then you may reſt aſſured, that all
" things ſhall ultimately work for your good.
" Amidſt the buſy haunts of men;—Let prudence

" be

" be your polar virtue, and the teſtimony of a " good conſcience, will be your ſweeteſt reward.

" I obſerved many get before me in life, with- " out grieving at their proſperity: for I was " perſuaded, Providence had placed me, juſt where " it was beſt for me to be. On acting my part " well, depended my felicity. Be contentment " yours, and baniſh envy, which is a ſecret poiſon " that weakens, if it doth not deſtroy every fine, " and nobler feeling of the breaſt. Tell with " humble triumph, by your practice, more than " by your tongues, to all mere worldlings:—Your " glittering heaps of gold are your's, but my Re- " deemer's mine. In a word, may Chriſt be " formed in each of your hearts the hope of glory, " and then my dear children, whether you be rich " or poor,—whether your days be few or many,— " whether you be healthy or infirm,—whether you " be reſpected or defamed, is of little concern,— " for we ſhall yet meet,—and what will enhance " the bleſſing, to part no more, in the reſurrection " of the juſt. To your Father's God I leave you, " —Farewell,—I die in peace."

Contraſt this glorious exit, with many that have accumulated large fortunes, who in the ſame ſituation, viz, a dying bed, were they to ſpeak the truth, it would run thus. " What I bequeath, " is the pitiful price of my immortal ſoul, which " I got by grinding the faces of the poor:—by " trampling on juſtice, when its penalties, could

" with ſafety be avoided ;—by diſregarding moral
" obligation :—by taking every advantage, and
" proſtituting truth to gain. In every tranſaction
" with my fellow-creatures, to over-reach them
" was leſs or more, in ſome ſhape or other my
" deſign ; and to ſucceed, was my pleaſure. Often
" did I raiſe difficulties, and counterfeit reluctance,
" where my inclination panted to embrace, only,
" that I might the eaſier ſecure my point. My
" way was, to give but little for valuable conſide-
" rations, eſpecially, when I had reaſon to think,
" the circumſtances of the individuals were ſuch,
" as would neceſſarily compel them, to accede to
" my terms, however rigorous or hard.

" Provided detection could be eluded, and the
" appearance of honeſty ſupported, for even theſe
" are eſſentially requiſite, to be able, the ſurer to
" deceive. I preyed upon thoſe, who would never
" have come near me, unleſs forced by thoſe com-
" plicated diſtreſſes, wherewith Providence, as by
" fire tried them, or to which their own impru-
" dence had reduced them. Totally deaf to the
" calls of humanity ;—careleſs of all religious du-
" ties ;—and without any fixed thoughts for the
" concerns of an inviſible ſtate ; my whole time
" was ſpent in deviſing plans of future greatneſs ; in
" adding houſe to houſe, or field to field. I dare
" not deny, but that I knew the Almighty, whoſe
" arrows now ſtick faſt in me, had challenged one
" day in the ſeven, to be ſet apart more eſpecially,

" for

" for holy adoration of himſelf,—ſacred medita-
" tion,—and ſpiritual improvement, which I en-
" tirely neglected, except now and then on a rainy
" Sunday, when I could with equal convenience
" go no where elſe,—and had neither company,
" nor books to poſt. What an infatuated wretch
" have I been?—The ſight of my children,—of
" faithful miniſters,—of admoniſhing friends,—
" and of the Bible, pierce my heart with unutter-
" able anguiſh. For all theſe things, I am now
" going to give an account, at the dreadful tri-
" bunal, of an offended and omnipotent God.
" Where—Ah, where indeed?—Were I ſpared but
" a little longer—unavailing requeſt:"—for Oh!
—See, he turns his head—his eyes ſink—his
pale lips faintly quiver—he deeply ſighs—groans,
—and dies.

To return from this affecting ſtatement, Zaccheus, as a publican, had an opportunity of doing wrong, under the ſpecious pretence of taking care of the revenue. By thus inſinuating into the favour of government, ſuch characters had the ear of their ſuperiors; which gave them the power of gratifying their reſentment very eaſily, if they bore any perſon a grudge. This was the temptation, that John the Baptiſt cautioned them againſt:—Then came alſo publicans to be baptized, and ſaid unto him, Maſter, what ſhall we do? And he ſaid unto them, Exact no more than that which is ap-

pointed you *. What enhances the virtue of Zaccheus is, that its immediate fruits beſpeak the ſtrength of its principle: he does not put it off, till perhaps ſome unexpected change in his rank, or the ill-will of ſome ſuperior, ſubjects him to the rigor of the law, compelling him, with accumulated diſgrace, to do that, which his own inclination kept him from doing: reſembling thoſe, who having grown great by iniquity, are honeſt when they cannot help it. Far from imagining, that giving half his goods to the poor, was a ſufficient compenſation, for the injuries he had done; and perſuaded, that the Almighty hates robbery, were it even for burnt-offerings, he is reſolved to do juſtice, as well as love mercy. An honeſt man will call nothing his own, till his debts are paid, and reſtitution made, where his mind aſſures him it is requiſite. And they who, to pamper their appetites or vanity, live beyond their income, and contract debts without any reaſonable proſpect of payment: who are indifferent to the load their diſſipation makes others bear, provided they have the expenditure; are the worſt ſpecies of depredators on the rights of mankind. When debts are owing to narrow circumſtances;—want of employment;—long ſickneſs;—or a numerous family, the caſe is quite different, and calls for the warmeſt

* Luke iii. 12, 13.

exertions

exertions of humanity. To diſtreſs, ariſing from the laſt-mentioned particulars, every true Zaccheus will be a friend:—whereas to the troubles reſulting from the former, except upon evident proofs of amendment, the turning away, in a great meaſure, will neither tarniſh virtue, nor argue want of candour, in the heart and character, of any true Samaritan.

Verſe 9th. *And Jeſus ſaid unto him; This day is ſalvation come to this houſe, for ſo much as he alſo is a ſon of Abraham.*

After heart-felt confeſſion, and reſolutions of amendment directly reduced to practice; behold the acceptance ſuch conduct finds, and the approbation it meets with. Before we can enjoy the bleſſings of pardon, and a good conſcience; we muſt part with ſin both in heart and in life. Now that Zaccheus ſaw virtue and vice in their native colours, he burſts from the long-loved embrace of the one, to form the ſtricteſt connexion with the other: and that from the abhorrence he hath at vice, and the regard he entertains for whatſoever things are honeſt, lovely, pure, true, and of good report, independent of the rewards promiſed in a coming ſtate. Doubtleſs, when he was qualified to take a juſt view of theſe, as deſcribed by the Saviour, they added much to his knowledge, and more to the alacrity, and uniformity of his obedience. Still we apprehend it holds, that the individual

dividual ſhunning vice, ſimply on account of its frightful conſequences, whether as felt from experience, or as ſtated in the holy Scriptures, cannot juſtly be ſaid to hate it: and whoſoever doth not hate it, will frequently be its ſlave.

Some rich men would rather have loſt their lives, than parted with what Zaccheus did; and had they been forced to do ſo, would have run to deſpair, or felt it ever after. But in the caſe before us, the condeſcenſion of the Saviour in ſaying,—"To-day I muſt abide at thy houſe," filled the heart of Zaccheus with truer felicity and gladneſs, than he had ever experienced before in the roads of worldly pleaſure, and practices of oppreſſion; and in his own eſtimation, was far preferable to all his gold and ſilver. Well might the Pſalmiſt avow, that one day in the courts or ſervice of the Lord, was better than a thouſand ſpent in ſin. All the ſcorn which the angry Phariſees could throw out, at this period, affected him not, neither in the leaſt interrupted, his paying every poſſible mark of the kindeſt attention, to his Divine Gueſt.

The higheſt boon is ſtill in reſerve; which when granted, multiplied the joy, and completed the bleſſing. The ſame Lord who ſhall be the judge of quick and dead, and who ſaid to the penitent thief, in the hour of his own amazing ſufferings: "To-day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe;"

with

with equal mercy accoſts the penitent publican; "This day ſalvation is come unto thy houſe." A total change,—a marvellous change,—a gracious change, hath paſſed in the heart of Zaccheus:—he is now by the ſpiritual application of the blood of Chriſt, and the regeneration of the Holy Ghoſt, renewed in the ſpirit of his mind. The hard and ſtony heart is taken away, and he hath got an heart, where the Almighty hath wrote his laws, and ſweetly aſſured him, that he will be his father, and he ſhall be to him a ſon. Conſequently he is tranſlated from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan to the kingdom of the living God. With tranſport he feels the inward teſtimony of the Divine Spirit, witneſſing that there is no condemnation to them who are in Chriſt Jeſus, who walk not after the fleſh, but according to the doctrine and example of their Redeemer. Whatever were his fears and dread a little ago, or however juſt, reſpecting his paſt life they might have been, they are all vaniſhed, like thick vapours before the riſing Sun: nay the Supreme Being promiſes, as a thick cloud to remove far from them, his people's tranſgreſſions. And what hath he to fear, who is ſaved from the guilt, and delivered from the love and practice of ſin? which may frequently plague him, but ſhall no more habitually reign in him. Death he now thinks of without terror; and on eternity he muſes

with

with rapturous delight. A future ſtate, if we may uſe the expreſſion, is the very food of his ſoul; and in contemplation, fires his zeal for the honour and glory of God; while it points to a line of behaviour, the moſt pleaſing to himſelf, and if attended to, of the higheſt utility to others.

Inſtead of worldly treaſure liable to various accidents, by this grant of his Saviour, he obtains a heavenly inheritance, adequate to his moſt enlarged deſires, and incorruptible in the Heavens. Inſtead of an earthly houſe, where thieves may break through and ſteal; at beſt ſubject to fire and falling, he looks forward with pure ſerenity and exultation of ſpirit, to an houſe not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens, where Angels, with an innumerable company of juſt men made perfect, ſhall be his companions through all eternity. Cæſar's imperial crown was a bauble, compared to that hereby announced: and which neither Cæſar's power, nor all the malice of men, or powers of darkneſs, could deprive him of.

The Sovereign of the Univerſe is directed by his own infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, and doth in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, according to his will and pleaſure. As in the caſe of Lydia and the Jailor, ſo here his grace extendeth to the whole houſe. The Chriſtian Zaccheus becomes a bleſſing to his family, nor is it otherwiſe ſtill, ſeeing the practice

of

of piety, entails the bounties of Providence on our poſterity. We read in the ſacred page:—He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own houſe, and brings a curſe upon it; whereas the humane character, brings the choiceſt gifts of Heaven down. How full, with declarations of this happy tendency, are the oracles of God?—Not only the maſter, but his beloved wife,—his precious children,—extatic thought! are found of him, they neither knew nor ſought,—nay his ſervants, who kindly officious, had attended to the bleſſed Jeſus, are all admitted members of the Church of God, and kept ever after by his power, through faith unto ſalvation.

Heathens and publicans were counted on a par. And if he ſhall neglect to hear thee, tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man, and a publican *. Zaccheus, through the ſtrength and ſincerity of his faith, is become a ſon of Abraham: wherefore his buſineſs, no longer ought to be mentioned, by way of reflecting on him. His belief in the Meſſiah, is an evidence of his being choſen in Chriſt. To be a ſon of Abraham, is to walk in the ſteps and faith of Abraham. The venerable Patriarch left his country, with many ſoft endearments and tender ties, when God was pleaſed to call: ſo Zaccheus left his office, and almoſt all his fortune, when brought to a knowledge of the

* Matth. xviii. 17.

truth,

truth, and called to nobler purſuits by the Meſſiah. Abraham deſired to ſee the day of Goſpel grace:—ſaw it afar off, and was glad:—in like manner, Zaccheus wiſhed the ſight of Jeſus,—obtained it, and rejoiced. He that was once a ſinner, and deemed by men, of a profligate character, is through grace allied to the Father of the Faithful, and ſhall reſt in his boſom, when the undiſcerning ſelf-conceited Phariſees, and rich gluttons, like him of old, who called Abraham father, ſhall be diſowned, and their moſt importunate requeſts be denied.

Verſe 10th. *For the ſon of man is come to ſeek, and to ſave that which was loſt.*

Hereby denoting himſelf, who came to ſeek out his flock, which owing to various cauſes had been much ſcattered, to gather the out-caſts of Iſrael, and in a word, to ſeek and ſave thoſe who by ſin were loſt, as to their precious ſouls, being enemies to God and goodneſs, and without either ability or inclination to extricate themſelves, or regain the favour of their Maker. For this end he veiled his glory, which he had with the Father before the world began, and tabernacled here amongſt men, full of grace and truth, that by quickening, calling, waſhing, and ſanctifying thoſe, who were dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, he might preſent them as a ſacrifice of a ſweet-ſmelling ſavour unto God, and make them a royal prieſthood, an holy nation,

a peculiar

a peculiar people, enabling them to ſhew forth in their lives, the praiſes of him that loved them, and gave himſelf for them. Repeatedly had he aſſured them, this was his errand upon earth. I am not come to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance *. They that are whole have no need of the phyſician, but they that are ſick †. In how important and ſtriking a light doth the Apoſtle place it,—This is a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Chriſt Jeſus came into the world to ſave ſinners ‡. And we are perſuaded every ſincere penitent, from a recollection of the greatneſs and complicated circumſtances of his own guilt, will be ready to add with him:—of whom I am chief.

The above truths, with many of a like kind interſperſed through the preceding Expoſitions, are much conteſted in the preſent day. There are eminent writers, who deny the Trinity, becauſe, as they ſay, of its inconſiſtency with the Unity of the Divine Nature. There are who deny the Divinity or equality of the Son of God:—his miraculous conception;—incarnation;—atonement;—mediatorial office, with almoſt every thing the Scriptures have ſaid about him. What obligations mankind are under to them, and what ſhall be the reward of their labours, will be beſt diſcovered at the day

* Matth. ix. 13. † Mark ii. 17.
‡ 1 Tim. i. 15.

of judgment. In the mean time, they muſt grant, that even among the moſt ſerious inquirers after truth, all minds are not equally ſtrong in themſelves, or enlightened by other aids, wherefore let them impart to thoſe differing from them, a ſhare of that liberality and candour, whereof they arrogate no ſmall quantity, reſpecting their own opinions. Why cenſure thoſe equally ſincere, who believe tenets, the moſt oppoſite to theirs, from a conviction of their acting in conſonancy to the word of God, and ſecuring the beſt intereſts of their immortal ſouls. Theſe are neither a ſmall, or uninformed party; ſeeing numbers with fine talents, improved by the beſt opportunities, are not aſhamed of the croſs of Chriſt; nor backward to defend the diſtinguiſhing doctrines of grace, againſt Free-thinkers, under whatever diſguiſe. Whether any be intimidated from owning theſe truths, in the pulpit or from the preſs, owing to their not being faſhionable, and therefore avoid them, by only ſaying and writing, things pretty and pleaſing, is a point, we wiſh every ſpeaker and writer, to ſettle with his own conſcience. Perſecution in any degree or ſhape, is as deteſtable as unjuſt. Human articles are the fetters of religion. The Scriptures contain thoſe of our faith, which the judgment of every man is to adjuſt for himſelf. Hence, diverſity of opinions there will be, but why diſcord or animoſity? Under the mild

ſpirit

ſpirit of the Goſpel, ſuch things ought not once to be named.

To return from this ſhort digreſſion, and to conclude: Happy are they who, like Zaccheus, are at pains, in oppoſition to the ſcorn and deriſion of thoſe around them, to put themſelves in the way the Saviour paſſes; for if we are diligent in the uſe of the means, we have reaſon to expect, that the Lord of life will grant to us the gracious look he gave this publican, implanting by his ſpirit, that true faith in us, which will produce a total change, and that love to him expreſſing itſelf in obedience to him, and kindneſs to all his members, which will be a ſure teſtimony, that ſalvation is come to our ſouls, and that after this ſtate of vanity and woe is ended, we, waſhed in his blood, ſhall be made kings and prieſts unto our God, and have manſions in his Father's houſe, for ever and for ever. Amen, and Amen.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Page 56, line 5, from the bottom, for conjectures, read conjecture.—P. 68, line 2, from the top, for ho-hour, r. honour.—P. 102, line 4, from the bottom, for pi, r. pit.—P. 111, line 12, from the top, for Tirem, r. Fium.—P. 111, line 14, from the top, after to, r. be.—P. 151, line 10, from the bottom, for when, r. where.—P. 201, line 11, from the top, for pricked, r. wicked.—P. 251, line 7, from the bottom, for which, r. who.—P. 310, line 5, from the top, for 70,000, r. 185,000.—P. 373, l. 9, from the bottom, for over, r. near.